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PATRIARCH OF EUROPEAN UNION

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M. B. BISKUPSKI

SPY, PATRIOT OR INTERNATIONALIST? THE EARLY CAREER OF JÓZEF RETINGER, POLISH PATRIARCH OF EUROPEAN UNION¹

At Józef Hieronim Retinger's funeral in 1960 Sir Edward Bedington-Behrens remarked that he had "complete entrée in every political circle."² Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands reckoned him one of the few men to make an indelible mark on his time, albeit in virtual anonymity. The *New York Times* said of him: "Mr. Retinger . . . was on intimate terms with most leading statesmen of the Western world, including presidents of the United States."³ He has been repeatedly acknowledged as one of the principle architects of the movement for European unity after the Second World War, and "one of the outstanding creative political influences of the postwar period."⁴ He has even been credited with being the *spiritus movens* behind the so-called "Bilderberger Group," described variously as an organization of idealistic internationalists and a malevolent global conspiracy.⁵

1. Research for this article was begun on a grant from the East European Program of the Woodrow Wilson Institute for Scholars, and completed thanks to the generosity of a Fulbright Research Professorship at the Instytut Historyczny at the University of Warsaw. Research assistance from Martin McCarthy was invaluable, as were observations of Professors Anna Cienciala, Piotr S. Wandycz and Wesley Wark.

2. Quoted in Armen Victorian, "The Bilderberg Group: The Invisible Power House," *Nexus Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 1 (December, 1995-January, 1996), p. 1.

3. "Joseph Retinger, Polish Democrat," *New York Times*, June 24, 1960, p. 27.

4. David C. Riede, "Retinger, Joseph Hieronim," Warren F. Kuehl, editor, *Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 606.

5. For recent sensationalist accounts of Retinger and the Bilderbergers, see "The Bilderberg and the New World Order," <http://www.parascope.com/mx/bilder.htm>, and "It's the Silly Season: Bilderbergers are Meeting in Secret Again," *Conspiracy Nation*, vol. 8, no. 22 (nd), <http://www.europa.com/johnlf/cn/cn8-22>. For a sympathetic assessment of Retinger's association with the Bilderbergers, see Henk Aben, "Sprong naar gouden ELES," 1, <http://www.dds.nl/~ecbn/europa/vanmorgen/archief/evm/nr12/12eles.htm>.

What Retinger was, or indeed who he was, has baffled a generation of historians who have discovered his name or his influence in a score of places, seemingly unconnected, often implausible, sometimes incomprehensible.

Throughout his long and mysterious career on the international political scene Retinger was described as an agent of British, American, German, Austrian, or perhaps Japanese intelligence and the chief architect of a Vatican-inspired plan to reorganize central Europe under the guidance of the Jesuit Order during World War I.⁶ In the interwar world he was initially destitute in Spain, but soon active in the Abd-el-Krim rising in Morocco in the 1920s.⁷ He was also, simultaneously, a major link between the Polish socialists and the left-wing of British politics,⁸ and between London financial circles and the Warsaw government.⁹ A report to the Polish Prime Minister noted, almost

6. The clearest version of this charge linking Retinger's internationalism and the Jesuits with his World War I actions is made in the rather lurid and poorly documented article by Victorian, "The Bilderberg Group."

7. Jozef Garliński, *Poland, SOE and the Allies* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 162.

8. Retinger enjoyed very close, though very unclear relations with both the Polish Socialist Party and the Labour Left in Great Britain. His English father-in-law (Labour MP E. D. Morel) was prominent in Labour politics, and Retinger and Stafford Cripps had been friends for many years. In 1924 Labour came to power in London, and Warsaw was trying to improve relations with London as part of an effort to gain a British loan (Wiesław Balcerak, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski w dobie Locarna* [Polish Foreign Policy in the Locarno Era] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1967), p. 33). Retinger's ties to the Polish government were manifold and mysterious in the 1920s. In this regard see Wojciech Materski, "Diplomacja RP wobec problemu bezpieczeństwa państwa (maj 1923-maj 1926)" [The Diplomacy of the Polish Republic Regarding the Problem of National Security (May 1923-May 1926)] in Piotr Łossowski, editor, *Historia dyplomacji polskiej. Tom IV. 1918-1939* [The History of Polish Diplomacy, Vol. IV: 1918-1939] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995), p. 270 n. 167. Indeed, Retinger reputedly wrote the important analysis (*Poland and Peace*) of international affairs ascribed to Aleksander Count Skrzyński, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1924; a work anticipating a large and positive British continental role. The relationship between Skrzyński and Retinger is a fascinating topic for speculation (see: Jan Drohojowski, *Wspomnienia dyplomatyczne* [Diplomatic Memories] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1959), p. 50). Wincenty Witos, twice prime minister in the 1920s, noted cryptically that before 1926 Retinger "lurked about several [Polish] parties and ministries and was used by them for various unofficial missions, especially to the West," (Wincenty Witos, *Moja tułaczka* [My Wandering] (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1967), p. 460).

9. An important work in this regard, based on scattered documentation, is Maria Nowak-Kielbikowa, *Polska-Wielka Brytania w dobie zabiegów o zbiorowe bezpieczeństwo w Europie, 1923-1937* [Poland and Great Britain in the Era of Efforts at Collective Security in Europe, 1923-1937] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydaw-

with astonishment, that Retinger enjoyed the respect and friendship of the “highest English officials” who regard him as a “politician of broad competence” whose views on general European problems — not just Polish affairs — were accorded serious attention.¹⁰ In the same decade Retinger was the principle financial advisor to the revolutionary government of Mexico, and briefly an inmate of an American jail.¹¹ By the 1930s, however, he was back in Europe, again a link between Polish politics and the British political left; according to some, he was a “fellow-traveler” at the very least, if not an agent of the Comintern, perhaps even a link between the British Communist Party and the Kremlin.¹² Throughout much of the interwar era Retinger was deeply involved in the opposition to the government in Warsaw, joining scattered, disgruntled emigrés like the erstwhile Premier Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the peasant leader Wincenty Witos, and the soldier and would-be statesman General Władysław Sikorski.¹³

By the outbreak of the Second World War, Retinger was rumored to be a major figure in “international Jewish masonry,” and a high official of the British B’nai B’rith. Soon thereafter he was described as either a Soviet spy, a

nictwo Naukowe, 1989), pp. 53-63, 155; see also Henryk Jabłonki, “Z tajnej dyplomacji Władysława Grabskiego w roku 1924” [Władysław Grabski’s Secret Diplomacy in 1924], *Kwartalnik Historyczny* [Historical Quarterly], no. 4-5 (1956), pp. 440-455.

10. Adam Roniker to Władysław Grabski, March 12, 1924, in Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Kapitały obce w Polsce, 1918-1939* [Foreign Capital in Poland, 1918-1939] (Warsaw: Księążka i Wiedza, 1964), p. 89.

11. Important details from this period in Retinger’s life are presented, though very briefly, in Z. S. Siemaszko, “Retinger w Polsce w 1944 r.” [Retinger in Poland in 1944], *Zeszyty Historyczne* [Historical Notebooks], vol. 12 (1967), pp. 59-60.

12. Regarding his associations with the extreme left, including communists, see Jan Ciechanowski, “Józef Retinger (1888-1957) [sic!] w świetle raportów brytyjskiego wywiadu z lat 1913 do 1941” [Józef Retinger (1888-1957) in the Light of Reports from British Intelligence from 1913-1941], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 59 (1982), p. 201.

13. Retinger had been associated with the Christian Democratic opposition in Poland from the late 1920s (Bożena Krzywoblocka, *Chadecja, 1918-1937* [Christian Democracy, 1918-1937] (Warsaw: Księążka i Wiedza, 1974), p. 164. Some important documents concerning his links to the prominent Christian Democrat Wojciech Korfanty are in Andrzej Suchcitz, “Listy Wojciecha Korfantego do Józefa Retingera” [Wojciech Korfanty’s Letters to Józef Retinger], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 73 (1985), pp. 222-228. Korfanty would later join with Sikorski, Witos and Paderewski in an emigré opposition to the government in Warsaw, the so-called *Front Morges*, of the late 1930s. Retinger was their unofficial representative in England.

British agent, or a patriotic Pole, and possibly all three. That he was the principle advisor to General Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile, is beyond question.¹⁴ Retinger played a personal role in bringing Sikorski to London after the collapse of France in 1940, possibly as Churchill's emissary.¹⁵ In April 1944, though far from young and in poor health, he was parachuted into German-occupied Poland. Though ostensibly on a mission from his own government, Retinger may also have been acting, again, for the British.¹⁶ So secret was Retinger's mission that he "entered the aircraft wearing a mask,"¹⁷ and as late as 1966 General Sir Colin Gubbins,

14. Retinger knew Sikorski from 1923 at the latest (see Suchcitz, "Listy . . .," p. 233). After the fall of France, Retinger became Secretary to the Council of Ministers of the Polish Government-in-Exile of which Sikorski was Premier. He was almost constantly with Sikorski thereafter. When Poland re-established diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia in 1941, it was Retinger who first, provisionally, represented it in this vital post. Whereas many Polish commentators ascribe to Retinger very considerable influence over Sikorski, Edward Count Raczyński, Poland's ambassador to Great Britain during World War II, rejects this and regards him more an "adventurer" (Edward Raczyński and Tadeusz Żenczykowski, *Od Genewy do Jalta* [From Geneva to Yalta] (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1991), p. 45. This, of course, begs the question of why he was entrusted with crucial assignments.

15. An important source regarding Retinger's role in this matter is Włodzimierz Onacewicz, "Komentarze do książki Leona Mitkiewicza *Z Generalem Sikorskim na obczyźnie*" [Comments on the Book of Leon Mitkiewicz *With General Sikorski Abroad*], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 18 (1970), pp. 170-171; compare Tadeusz Panecki, "Generał Władysław Sikorski" in Stefan Zwoliński, editor, *Naczelní wodzowie i wyżsi dowódcy polskich sił zbrojnych na zachodzie* [Commanders-in-Chief and Senior Commanders of the Polish Armed forces in the West] (Warsaw: Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny, 1995), p. 43; and Tadeusz Panecki, *Polonia zachodnioeuropejska w planach Rządu RP na emigracji (1940-1944): Akcja kontynentalna* [West European Polonia in the Plans of the Polish Government-in-Exile (1940-1944): Continental Action] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986), p. 50; and Mieczysław Nurek, *Polska w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1936-1941* [Poland in British Policy, 1936-1941] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983), p. 294ff.

16. Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War . . .*, p. 113; the most detailed accounts of this episode are in Grzegorz Mazur and Kazimierz Ostrowski, "Przyczynek do pobytu Józefa Retingera w Polsce" [A Contribution to the Question of Józef Retinger's Visit to Poland], *Studia Historyczne* [Historical Studies], vol. 32, no. 4 (1989), pp. 621-628; and Siemaszko, "Retinger w Polsce." Jerzy Lerski contends that Premier Stanisław Mikołajczyk told him at the time that he did not trust Retinger but was allowing his mission due to British pressure (Jerzy Lerski, *Poland's Secret Envoy, 1939-1945* (New York, Bicentennial Publishing Co., 1988), p. 168).

17. Garliński, *Poland, SOE . . .*, p. 162.

chief of the Special Operation Executive of World War II, insisted that certain details of his remarks about Retinger's mission remain secret.¹⁸ Retinger's loyalties to Poland were so suspect that members of the Polish General Staff apparently decided to have Retinger assassinated in 1944.¹⁹ Retinger's activities during the war are still largely unexplained.²⁰ It is obvious, however, that he had direct access to the highest reaches of the British government, including lengthy personal meetings with Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden.²¹

In the postwar era Retinger was active in the movement for European unity, serving as Secretary General of the European Movement which, in August, 1950, established the Council of Europe at Strasbourg, a direct antecedent of the Common Market.²² In addition, he was dedicated to negotiating a reconciliation between the Church of England and the Vatican, and even managed an audience with Cardinal Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, in this vain enterprise.²³ Until the last months of his life he was actively intriguing

18. See Gubbins's correspondence in Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, "Wojskowi o Retingerze" [Soldiers' Views of Retinger], *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* [Military Historical Review], vol. 37, no. 3 (1992), pp. 90-91.

19. This information was first bruited several years ago (see Maria Żochowska and Stanisław Żochowski, *Nasz Pamiętnik, 1914-1984* [Our Memoir, 1914-1984] (Brisbane-London: Poets and Painters' Press, 1984), p. 185; and Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja w miniaturze," [The Gray Eminence in Miniature], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 23 (1973), pp. 179-181. The most detailed collection of evidence of this still very mysterious episode has been collected by Siemaszko in "Wojskowi"

20. Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War* . . . , pp. 274-275.

21. Regarding Retinger's relations with Churchill and Eden, see Jan Nowak, *Courier from Warsaw* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), p. 338. Sikorski admitted that his main interest in Retinger was his ability to arrange direct access to the leaders of the British government (Sikorski's remarks in Jerzy Lerski, *Poland's Secret Envoy*, pp. 77-78). reciprocally, and perhaps ironically, the British apparently regarded Retinger as having such influence with Sikorski that they felt compelled to deal seriously with him (Foreign Office minutes of January 1, 1940, cited in John Coutouvidis, "Sikorski's Thirty-day Crisis, 19 June - 19 July, 1940" in Keith Sword , editor, *Sikorski: Soldier and Statesman* [London: Orbis, 1990], p. 137, n. 101).

22. Thomas W. Braden, Ececutive Director, American Committee on United Europe, to Editor, *New York Times*, February 15, 1950, in *New York Times*, June 24, 1960, p. 27. Retinger was also Secretary-General of the European League for Cooperation; in fact, David Riede credits him with having "won over leading European economists to the idea of eliminating national economic barriers in Europe" (Riede, "Retinger," p. 606; see Aben, "Sprong naar gouden ELES," p. 1).

23. Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," p. 174.

in Polish emigré politics, a figure of controversy until the very end.²⁴ Until his death, and long after, the most often repeated explanation for Retinger's actions was that he was, perhaps for many years, a secret agent of the British government acting under the direct orders of its highest officials.²⁵

Observers of Retinger's long career have repeatedly confronted severe difficulties. Many of the episodes in which he participated are impossible to reconstruct clearly. A sympathetic biography by his secretary, with frequent Retinger quotations, is fragmentary and unreliable.²⁶ Documentary evidence concerning his highly secretive "diplomatic" activities is exceedingly rare, fragmentary and contradictory. Most of his contemporaries were suspicious of him, and all of them were bewildered by his mysterious travels, meetings and actions. The few works devoted to him that exist are partisan and insubstantial. Thus, the most basic question about Retinger remains unanswered: What, or who, guided his actions? Was he, ultimately, a British agent, as has been repeatedly asserted by many Poles, or was he, as a

24. Stanisław Babiński to [Michał] Sokolnicki, March 22, 1959, in Stanisław Babiński, editor, *Kazimierz Sosnkowski: Mysl, praca, walka* [Kazimierz Sosnkowski: His Thought, Work and Struggle] (London: Veritas, 1988), p. 353.

25. This charge has been made widely and repeatedly. The following story is only a representative sampling: Retinger was "a British political agent," Stanisław Mackiewicz, *Lata nadziei 17 września 1939 - 5 lipca 1945 r.* [Years of Hope, September 17, 1939 - July 5, 1945] (Warsaw: Głos, 1900 [1945]), p. 78. Respected diplomat and scholar W. W. Kulski regarded Retinger as a British spy; see his review of George V. Kacewicz, *Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the Polish Government-in-Exile, 1939-1945* in *The Polish Review*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1981), pp. 123-127. According to Landau and Tomaszewski (*Kapitaly obce w Polsce*, p. 396) Retinger was, as early as the 1920s, "a collaborator [współpracownik] with British intelligence. Garliński deemed Retinger "almost certainly a British political agent" in his *Poland in the Second World War*, p. 113. He was also an "agent" [postać agenturalna] according to Tadeusz Katelbach ("Akt pierwszy dramatu" [The First Act of the Drama], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 8 [1965], p. 35.)

26. Jan Pomian, Retinger's secretary and confidant during his last several years, published *Joseph Retinger. Memoirs of an Eminence Grise* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1972). In 1990, a Polish language edition, "corrected and enlarged," was published: *Józef Retinger: Życie i pamiętniki "szarej eminencji"* [Józef Retinger: The Life and Memoirs of a "Gray Eminence"] (Warsaw: Pelikan, 1990). Yet another Polish edition appeared in 1994, *Józef Retinger: Życie i pamiętniki pioniera jedności europejskiej* [Józef Retinger: the Life and Memoirs of a Pioneer of European Unity] (Warsaw: PAVO, 1994). The two Polish language editions have identical texts, though they vary in format. All citations in this article are from the 1994 edition, hereafter cited as Pomian, *Pamiętniki*. This is a very frustrating volume which is frequently unreliable and in places it is difficult to discern when Retinger is, ostensibly, being quoted and when Pomian is interpreting his remarks. A valuable critique of this work is Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," pp. 172-185.

contemporary historian has charitably deemed him, "a citizen of the world rather than a spy."²⁷

The purpose of this article is twofold: First to analyze the formative years in Retinger's career on the international scene, that is, his complex actions during the First World War. This is preamble to a larger goal: namely an attempt at explaining Retinger. It is my contention that amid the farrago of activities one can discern a pattern of impulse and design which remained constant throughout his long career. I acknowledge at the outset that this can be but a preliminary and tentative explanation of Retinger; doubtless, there must be many references to him scattered about many archives not yet brought to light. However, I have recently discovered documents which do much to clarify Retinger's actions, even though they do not allow their full explanation. Hence, on the basis of admittedly inadequate resources this is an attempt to reconstruct the opening and, I am convinced, the normative phase of the career of the man known as the *eminence grise* of Polish, and perhaps European, politics.

I.

Józef Retinger was born in Cracow, Austrian-held Poland, in 1888. Despite his German-sounding name, his family was of Polish stock, though his paternal line originally came from Bavaria, and was quite uniformly Roman Catholic. This is an important particular because Retinger's later close relationship with Jewish organizations was often explained by his alleged Jewish origins.²⁸ The family was well-connected within the Cracow urban patriciate, and conspicuous members of the city's cultural elite. The premature death of Retinger's father made young Józef the unofficial ward of Władysław Count Zamoyski, scion of one of the wealthiest families in

27. Roman Wapiński, "Retinger, Józef Hieronim," in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* [Polish Biographical Dictionary], vol. 30/1, no. 128, (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988), p. 152.

28. Stanisław Mackiewicz, for example, regards Retinger as being of Jewish origin, stating that his father, a prominent attorney, was a convert and a "great patriot (*Lata Nadziei*, pp. 87-88). Lerski makes the same contention in *Poland's Secret Envoy*, p. 77. During World War II Retinger was a major figure in representing Sikorski's government to Jewish organizations in Great Britain. It is significant that he was regarded as not always sufficiently sensitive to Jewish issues in this capacity, and Israeli historian David Engel suggests that Retinger was not well-disposed towards Jews (*In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987], pp. 53, 67-68, 85, 238 n. 79.) The conclusion that Retinger's paternal ancestry was Catholic and Bavarian, and not Jewish, seems palusible (Jan Nowak to the Editor, June 28, 1982, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 61 [1982], p. 237).

Poland. Zamoyski supported Retinger generously, allowing him to complete his education at the Sorbonne from which he received a doctorate in 1908, perhaps the youngest contemporary European to earn that distinction.²⁹

Retinger later recalled the Zamoyski family as his "link to the legitimist tradition of European aristocracy from the era before Napoleon III . . . the living example of the famous encyclical of Leo XIII *Rerum novarum*."³⁰ Beyond their profound intellectual imprint, the Zamoyskis allowed Retinger an immediate access to the highest circles of European wealth and distinction; a world of influence that expanded rapidly over the next few years. In Paris, he became acquainted with the French cultural elite. This was facilitated by his guardian, Zamoyski, who was a French citizen and had family links throughout the west European aristocracy. Cousins of Retinger, the Godebski family (similarly French citizens) maintained a well-known Parisian salon to which he was at once admitted. Thus, in the years before World War I, Retinger established an extensive assortment of influential "contacts": Cardinal Baudrillart, Marshal Lyautey, and the bizarre dandy Marquis Boni de Castellane. This relationship was most fruitful, for de Castellane was on close terms with the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, whereas Boni's wife, the American Annie Gould, was reputed to be the wealthiest heiress in the world. De Castellane himself served briefly in the French parliament and had very powerful friends in both British and French political circles, especially on the left. In the world of the arts, Retinger became acquainted with André Gide, Maurice Ravel, Pierre Bonnard, Francois Poulenc, Leon-Paul Fargue, and Francois Mauriac, among innumerable others.

After brief periods in London, Munich and Italy — about which little is known — Retinger returned to Cracow, published a literary review which enjoyed a *succes d'estime*, and created thereby a network of contacts among the Polish literary establishment.³¹ It is apparently during this brief stay (1911-1912) that Retinger's political career began.

Retinger had, apparently, been approached by the representatives of the National Council [*Rada Narodowa* , or RN], a nationalistic organization of the Polish political right which was attempting to establish a network of filial organizations throughout Europe and North America.³² The RN was

29. The exact date of Retinger's doctoral degree is not certain: Pomian states unequivocally that it was 1908 (Pomian, *Pamiętniki*), whereas Wapiński indicates that the exact year is unknown ("Retinger," p. 148).

30. Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, p. 16.

31. Valuable comments about Retinger's brief publishing career and the cultural milieu in which it functioned can be found in the memoirs of his contemporary, Waclaw Lednicki (*Pamiętniki, Tom II* [Memoirs, Vol. II] [London: B. Świderski, 1967], pp. 68-73, 98-105, 148).

32. The *Rada Narodowa* was founded in Lwów in 1908 and was dominated by adherents of the Polish political right. Its president was Tadeusz Cieński. It estab-

militantly anti-German and emphasized that in any future war, Berlin would be the principle enemy of Polish independence. Retinger was to establish an information office in London and, acting in the spirit of the RN's anti-German orientation, distribute propaganda in the English-speaking world in favor of the Polish cause. Significantly, the anti-German inclinations of the RN were coupled with a rather indulgent view of the Habsburgs; hence anti-Austrian propaganda was decidedly not one of Retinger's tasks.

At the end of 1911 (or perhaps early 1912) Retinger moved to London, established a so-called *Polish Bureau*, in a single pathetic room on Arundel Street,³³ attended classes at the London School of Economics, and avidly continued his practice of cultivating prominent and powerful Britons and others. To the dramatist Arnold Bennet, whom he had met in Paris, he added Stafford Cripps, later a Labour politician and distinguished diplomat; Walter Hines Page, the American ambassador in London; as well as many other prominent members of the literary and political world.³⁴

In his efforts on behalf of the RN, Retinger met, and actively cultivated, two of his countrymen then in England: Ignacy Jan Paderewski, and, more consequentially, novelist Joseph Conrad. Indeed, Retinger rapidly became an intimate of the novelist, and Conrad became a great admirer of the youthful Retinger, crediting him with almost limitless political and diplomatic talent.³⁵ Retinger, in turn, was able to use Conrad's great fame as an entree to influential circles in Great Britain. Indeed, so close was the Conrad-Retinger

lished filial branches throughout western Europe before 1914 and one in Chicago as well.

33. For the address and description of the office, see Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 581, n. 3.

34. Retinger, *Conrad and His Contemporaries* (Miami, Florida: The American Institute of Polish Culture, 1981), p. 55ff; Olgierd Terlecki, *Kuzynek diabła* [The Devil's Little Cousin] (Cracow: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988), p. 11. There are multiple editions of Terlecki's brief yet important biography of Retinger. It was first issued in 1971 in a four-part series (nos. 1015-1018) in the Cracow periodical *Życie Literackie* [Literary Life] under the title "Wielka awantura" [Great Uproar]. These were collected into a book bearing the same title and published by the Polska Fundacja Kulturalna in London in 1978. The identical text was re-issued as *Barwne życie szarej eminencji* [The Colorful Life of the Gray Eminence] by the Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza in Cracow in 1981. Finally, an expanded edition, *Kuzynek diabła*, appeared in 1988. All references in this article are to the 1988 edition, hereafter cited as *Kuzynek*.

35. The fullest account of the burgeoning Retinger-Conrad friendship is in the exhaustively documented work by Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 381ff.

relationship that it has been noted by a contemporary Polish journalist, perhaps half-facetiously, that Conrad "recommended Retinger to British intelligence."³⁶

Retinger arranged, through the family of his wife (the Zubrzyckis), Conrad's nostalgic visit to Poland in the summer of 1914 — the emigré's return after more than twenty years.³⁷ Unfortunately for Conrad, his arrival coincided with the mobilization antecedent to the First World War, bringing his visit to a dramatic close. However brief his stay, Conrad was most active regarding Polish affairs. He held a great many meetings with Polish political activists and produced a most intriguing memorandum. In this document, Conrad clearly enunciated what has come to be called the pro-Austrian or "Austrophile" position regarding the question of Poland's possible rebirth. Conrad resolved to win British support for the Polish cause and British sympathy for Austria. Russia, Conrad decided, would certainly be defeated. By contrast, the defeat of Germany was scarcely imaginable, hence England must support Austria against Germany at any future peace conference to lessen the danger of German domination. In fine, London should be encouraged to "support Austria's Polish policy" while opposing German and Russian goals.³⁸ This program was virtually a prescription for Retinger's subsequent political activities.

For Retinger, also, the abbreviated visit had political significance. He later recalled that after seeing to the safety of the Conrad family he

went to Lwów, knowing that the major Galician leaders [of Polish politics] were found there. I met with archbishop [Józef] Bilczewski,³⁹ with the Armenian-Catholic archbishop [Józef] Teodorowicz,⁴⁰ and the representatives

36. Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, p. 11.

37. I rely here on the careful calculations of J. H. Stape in his "The Chronology of Conrad's 1914 Visit to Poland," *The Polish Review*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1984), pp. 65-71, as supplemented by John S. Lewis, "Conrad in 1914," *The Polish Review*, vol. 20, nos. 2-3 (1975), pp. 217-222.

38. This very important document was published as "Memorandum on the Polish Question" in Ludwik Krzyżanowski, "Joseph Conrad: Some Polish Documents" in Ludwik Krzyżanowski, editor, *Joseph Conrad: Centennial Essays* (New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1960), pp. 138-139. Krzyżanowski provides an English translation on pp. 123-124. Regarding Conrad's geopolitical views concerning Poland, see the recent essay by Eloise Knapp Hay, "Reconstructing 'East' and 'West' in Conrad's Eyes," in Keith Carabine, Owen Knowles and Wiesław Krajka, editors, *Contexts for Conrad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 21-40.

39. Józef Bilczewski (1860-1923), Metropolitan and Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lwów, also professor and later Rector of the University of Lwów.

40. Józef Teodorowicz (1864-1938), Archbishop of the Armenian Rite Cath-

of the major political parties, [Tadeusz] Cieński,⁴¹ [Jan] Dąbski,⁴² and others. They asked me to go, as fast as possible to France and England on their behalf. . . . I was to work on behalf of Polish independence with all the boldness and determination I could manage. They assured me that they would support all my actions in this regard.⁴³

Retinger was given letters addressed to the French and British Ministries of Foreign Affairs, a letter from the Polish episcopate to Archbishop Bourne of Westminster, and rather vague instructions. This was the beginning of Retinger's relationship with another Galician Polish political organization, the CKN [*Centralny Komitet Narodowy* or National Central Committee]. The CKN was a short-lived loose political congeries of parties with were moderately pro-Austrian as regards the looming war.⁴⁴ This new affiliation supplanted, though perhaps did not formally sever, his earlier linkage to the right-wing RN.⁴⁵

Retinger's return voyage to London in the summer of 1914 was certainly "remarkable" as recently noted by Włodzimierz Suleja.⁴⁶ His journey from

olic Church, Metropolitan of Lwów, member of the Austrian Herrenhaus, after World War I, member of the Polish parliament.

41. Cieński was president of the *Centralny Komitet Narodowy*, see note 31 above.

42. Jan Dąbski was a populist leader in Galicia. His party was associated with the CKN.

43. This passage, ostensibly, from Retinger's memoirs, is reprinted in Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, p. 32.

44. Regarding the CKN, see Jerzy Holzer and Jan Molenda, *Polska w pierwszej wojnie światowej* [Poland in the First World War] (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1973), p. 433. The main figure in the CKN was Tadeusz Cieński, whom Retinger met in Austrian Poland shortly before the outbreak of the war. Soon thereafter the CKN was absorbed into the larger Supreme National Committee [*Naczelny Komitet Narodowy* - NKN] which was also a complex coalition of factions. The NKN worked closely with the Habsburg authorities, favoring Austrian victory and Russian defeat.

45. Regardless of any formal connection, the politically-right RN had decided by the end of 1914 that Retinger was untrustworthy. Although evidence is scanty, the probable reason for its disenchantment with Retinger was the obvious connections he had already demonstrated with the CKN (see Maciej Loret to [Stanisław Osada], December 21, 1914, in *Papiery Wacława Gąsiorowskiego* [The Papers of Waclaw Gąsiorowski], sygn. 15226/II, Ossolineum, Wrocław).

46. See his "Szara eminencja" in Zbigniew Fras and Włodzimierz Suleja, *Poczet agentów polskich* [A Collection of Polish Agents] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1995), pp. 155-164.

Cracow to Vienna was arranged by Archbishop Bilczewski with considerable aid from the Austrian authorities. The Viennese Ministry of War provided him with an exit visa, initiated, notably, by the German ambassador in Vienna as well.⁴⁷ Arriving in Switzerland, Retinger received a visa from the French authorities (he also carried, *mirabile dictu*, a Russian passport), continued to Paris where, thanks again to Zamoyski,⁴⁸ he met with the highest officials in the Foreign Ministry, including Phillip Berthelot, and Foreign Minister Stephan Pichon himself.⁴⁹ His further journey to London was agreed by the French authorities who facilitated his travels. This astonishing chain of immensely useful contacts propelled the twenty-six-year-old Retinger onto the international stage.

In Paris, Retinger made the rounds of the Polish emigré leadership and implored them to undertake no action which would associate the Poles with support of France in the war, but rather to adopt an entirely neutral disposition. This impassioned effort made a particularly negative impression on those Poles who were already attempting to raise Polish volunteers to join the French war effort.⁵⁰

Soon after arriving in London, Retinger was able to meet Prime Minister Herbert Asquith with whom he apparently established an instantly warm relationship. Retinger was enormously impressed by Asquith whom he regarded, even long afterwards, as a great statesman.⁵¹ Retinger soon became a

47. Retinger's version of this episode strains credulity: He contends he misled military authorities in Lwów into thinking that his voyage to the West was at the behest of "very important personages," conveniently unnamed. He used the same tactic in dealing with the Austrian General Staff in Vienna, and even with German Ambassador Heinrich von Tschirsky, suggesting always that he had grave matters to attend in western Europe, vouchsafed him by the mighty (Pomian, *Zycie*, pp. 32-33). Suleja judges Retinger's account as "remarkable at the very least" ("Szara eminencja," p. 156). Terlecki clearly regards Retinger's account of these extraordinary travels as implausible, and concludes: "Ultimately we really know nothing about this episode" (*Kuzynek*, p. 18). Wapiński only notes laconically that Retinger moved about "without great difficulties" ("Retinger," p. 149).

48. Wapiński, "Retinger," p. 149.

49. This account of Retinger's 1914 journey from Lwów to London is based largely on his memoirs as published in Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, pp. 32-35; the detail concerning his possessing a Russian passport is from the files of the British Intelligence Service (Ciechanowski, "Retinger w świetle raportów," p. 201).

50. Gąsiorowski, *1910-1915*, pp. 218-219.

51. The specifics of Retinger's meeting with Asquith are, like so many aspects of his life, very vague. Pomian's account is most unsatisfactory as it provides no specific date, mentions that a "journalist friend" arranged Retinger's invitation to lunch with the Prime Minister, and even refers to Asquith as "Arthur"

frequent guest at Asquith's home, and met a number of the British political elite including both Churchill and Lord Kitchener. On August 31, 1914, Retinger called at the Foreign Office and presented a request, obviously from the Galician Poles [i.e., the CKN],⁵² whom he met Lwów, that the British government undertake to guarantee, in some unstated way, the recent Russian proclamation to the Poles (the August 14, 1914, Proclamation of the Russian Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich) which promised unification of partitioned Poland in exchange for Polish support of the Russian war effort.⁵³

The Austrian Poles were at pains to inform the British that whereas the large forces of international politics had ranged them with the Central Powers, they were, nonetheless, anti-German, though they maintained an affectionate loyalty regarding Austria. This was, in its infancy, the logic behind Retinger's later efforts to help Austria desert the Berlin alliance and come to a separate peace. Retinger was, throughout, always anti-German.⁵⁴

George Clark of the Foreign Office understandably rejected this request as "out of the question," but Retinger's démarche evidently elicited considerable reflection. Clerk wanted to maintain the contact with Retinger against future possibilities; Sir Arthur Nicolson (permanent Under Secretary) was decidedly opposed. He refused to meet Retinger, and referred to the whole issue as "foolish." The final determination was by Foreign Secretary Edward Grey who

(*Pamiętniki*, p. 35; note also Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," p. 173). Terlecki avoids the whole episode by the elliptical reference to the fact that Retinger "already knew" Asquith by 1915 (*Kuzynek*, p. 20).

52. Maciej Loret, Rada Narodowa's representative in Rome, referred to the documents Retinger received in Galicia in 1914 as "really opening the door for him [Retinger] to the most significant personages" in London; a summary of this observation is in "Wyciąg ze sprawozdania sekretarza Polskiego Centralnego Komitetu Ratunkowego w Ameryce" [Extract from the Report of the Secretary of the Polish Central Relief Committee in America], undated, *Papiery Rozwadowskich: Jana Rozwadowskiego działalność publiczna* [The Papers of the Rozwadowskis: the Public Activities of Jan Rozwadowski] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, sygn. 8005/II), p. 3.

53. This episode is noted in Kenneth J. Calder, *Britain and the Origins of the New Europe, 1914-1918* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976) pp. 23-24, but the details concerning its Polish aspects are inaccurate. See also Paul C. Latawski, "Great Britain and the Rebirth of Poland, 1914-1918: Official and Unofficial Influences on British Policy," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1985), p. 73f.

54. Before the war, one of Retinger's earliest efforts at Polish propaganda was a pamphlet published anonymously in London and Paris entitled "Poland and Prussia," condemning German mistreatment of Poles (Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," p. 184).

ordered that Retinger not be “snubbed,” but rather furnished with a sympathetic yet anodyne written assurance that the British government was “in thorough sympathy” with the Russian declaration and that public opinion had “welcomed cordially” the Russian step. Retinger was even allowed to publish the letter containing these assurances.⁵⁵

Having completed his first “diplomatic mission,” Retinger now apparently made himself useful to his new friends. Some high official of the British government, and circumstantial evidence suggests Prime Minister Asquith himself, decided to send Retinger to the United States (or make use of his intention of going there) in order to ascertain whether the Poles of America were seriously contemplating raising volunteers from among their compatriots to serve the cause of Britain and her allies. This episode, which I attempted to reconstruct from scattered sources some years ago, remains most obscure.⁵⁶ Retinger arrived in the United States in November 1914 letting it be known that he had access to the British government. He journeyed from New York to Chicago, met with the major Polish leadership in the United States, and left it totally bewildered: His behavior oscillated between hauteur, with frequent claims of representing powerful forces, and virtually panhandling as he asked his hosts to pay his hotel bills. In Chicago, Retinger explained that he had:

received oral instruction from the English war ministry to come to the States in order personally to investigate the readiness of the local Poles to participate in the war.⁵⁷

However, given American neutrality, the British were unable to accept any offers from the American Poles to volunteer. Hence, Retinger had nothing to say and there was no purpose in his coming. The American Poles were stunned by Retinger’s behavior, decided he was not to be trusted, and regarded the whole episode as incomprehensible.⁵⁸ An intriguing and characteristic sidelight of Retinger’s brief mission was his devoted effort to meet as many “eminent Americans” as possible, to which end he carried numerous letters of introduction.⁵⁹ The American Poles thought that Retinger intended to use

55. “Wyciąg ze sprawozdania,” pp. 3-4.

56. Mieczysław B. Biskupski, “Pierwszy występ ‘szarej eminentacji’?: Józef Retinger, Polonia amerykańska i sprawa wojska polskiego na obczyźnie, 1914 r.” [The First Appearance of the “Gray Eminence”? Józef Retinger, American Polonia, and the Question of a Polish Army in Exile, 1914,” *Niepodległość* [Independence], vol. 20 (1987), pp. 181-187.

57. “Wyciąg ze sprawozdania,” p. 2.

58. The Polish political right tried to warn its Polish American allies not to trust Retinger (Loret to [Osada], December 16, 1914, *Papiery Gaśiorowskiego*, sygn. 15226/II, Ossolineum, Wrocław).

59. For the issue of Retinger’s letters, his efforts at cultivating influential

these introductions to help create a pro-Polish lobby in the United States; Retinger, however, seems to have been pursuing his traditional practice of ingratiating himself to anyone who might matter for his own purposes, since the American Polonia gained no benefit from Retinger's efforts at self-promotion.⁶⁰

Whatever his intentions, Retinger only succeeded in convincing the Poles of America that he was a bizarre and mysterious man in whom they could repose no confidence. When he arrived in New York, he told American immigration authorities that the purpose of his voyage was to visit his brother, Juliusz, who was a professor at the University of Chicago.⁶¹ This verisimilitude served as a convenient pretext. Despite his brief stay, and apparently very limited funds, it is significant that Retinger went from New York to Washington to call at the British Embassy before continuing to Chicago. Unfortunately this detour has left no documentary trace.

Retinger's goals in his American mission are inexplicable. Was he really acting at the behest of the British government? What was he trying to accomplish in the United States? Was this, perhaps, yet another effort at personal ingratiating, albeit on a rather grand scale? But even if that were the only motive, why did Retinger trouble himself to come to the United States at all, especially just on the heels of an initial encouraging reception from Grey at the Foreign Office. Suleja is doubtless correct in regarding the whole episode as inexplicable. Nonetheless, I contend that, at the very least, Retinger sought two simultaneous and reciprocal goals: to convince the British that he had direct access to the leadership of the Polish community in the United States, and to impress the latter that he was in the confidence of the British government. He certainly conveyed the notion that he was acting on behalf of London, and other then, and later, drew the conclusion that he had become, in some measure, a British agent.

There is an important theme which should not be overlooked in considering Retinger's mysterious American "mission." Although he came, ostensibly, to investigate the question of Polonia volunteers for British service, he never said

Americans, and the reaction of Polish American leaders, see Biskupski, "Pierwszy wstęp," pp. 183-185.

60. As early as late 1914, Retinger was criticized for claiming he had some nebulous charge from both the British and French governments in his activities (Loret to [Osada], December 21, 1914, Papiery Gąsiorowskiego, sygn. 15226/II, Ossolineum, Wrocław).

61. Regarding Retinger's movements and contacts with American immigration authorities, see the report of Emil A. Solanka, March 9, 1921, in Record Group 65: Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, file BS 202600-966, microfilm reel 935, United States National Archives, Washington, DC, hereafter USNA.

his purpose was to encourage such an effort. Indeed, his behavior in Chicago was exactly the opposite, and his visit did a great deal to smother the rising sentiment in American Polish ranks to organize volunteers.⁶² Retinger was to claim shortly thereafter that he was opposed to the whole notion of raising a Polish volunteer force.⁶³ This claim is entirely consistent with his behavior in America, and allows us to consider the possibility that the main purpose of Retinger's mission may well have been to prevent Polish volunteer formations. There was even a rumor among the Poles of France that his American visit was financed by the Austrian Poles specifically to derail efforts at raising Polish volunteers in North America. There is even some evidence that, upon leaving the United States, Retinger traveled directly to Switzerland — where he is reputed to have moved in pro-Habsburg Polish circles — rather than to London.⁶⁴ Such actions would be consistent with what I believe to have been Retinger's broader attitude towards the war which I shall discuss below.

Although Retinger may have managed to establish himself, however tentatively, as an *homme du confiance* to British authorities, "his alleged Austrophilism [*nota bene*] and some financial troubles" ended his work as the London representative of the Galician Poles.⁶⁵ 1915 is thus largely a gap in the record of Retinger's activities. His Polish Information Bureau closed, precisely when is unclear, and with it his official link to Galicia. As a result, when Retinger next appeared on the political scene, he would represent only himself.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, an important episode in 1915 allows us an insight into his political thinking.

Early in 1915, Retinger had a noteworthy clash with the famous Polish

62. Wacław Gaśiorowski, *1919-1915: Historja armii polskiej we Francji* [1910-1915: History of the Polish Army in France] (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1931), pp. 220-221.

63. Henryk Sienkiewicz to Stanisław Osada, February 12, 1915, in Sienkiewicz o legionach, NKN i akcie 5 listopada 1916 r." [Sienkiewicz Concerning the Legions, KNK, and the November 5, 1916, Act], in *Komunikaty towarzystwa im. Romana Dmowskiego* vol. 1 (1970-71), (London: 1970), p. 289.

64. Gaśiorowski, *1910-1915*, p. 220.

65. Wiktor Sukienicki, *East Central Europe During World War I: From Foreign Domination to National Independence*, two volumes, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), vol. 1, p. 205. The Polish political right contended that Retinger was secretly promoting the interests of the pro-Austrian Poles from the start of the war; see the memoirs of Marjan Seyda, *Polska na przełomie dziejów* [Poland at History's Turning Point] (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1927), p. 294.

66. By late 1915 "Retinger did not belong to any political organization or group, but he consistently upheld the idea of Polish sovereignty vis-à-vis all three partitioning powers," Najder, *Conrad: A Chronicle*, p. 407.

pianist turned international lobbyist, Ignacy Jan Paderewski.⁶⁷ From the beginning of the war, Paderewski had been co-chairman (along with novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz) of a committee collecting aid for Polish victims of the war's ravages, the *Comité Général* located at Vevey, Switzerland. Although the committee was strictly humanitarian in its activities, a close look at its membership and less public activities make it very clear that the Vevey committee was highly partisan regarding the war, ardently supporting England and France and, by necessity, their Russian ally. Moreover, Vevey was resolutely anti-German and concomitantly anti-Austrian, although the latter inclination lacked real passion. In early 1915, Paderewski decided to expand the elemosynary activities of the Vevey committee by creating branches in Paris, London, and eventually the United States. He hoped to induce Conrad to join him in the British effort. However, to Paderewski's consternation, Conrad reacted violently to the presence of Russian officials among the supporters of the proposed London branch and refused his cooperation. Paderewski discussed this matter with Retinger, who completely shared Conrad's sentiments, and probably inspired the novelist's response.⁶⁸ Paderewski was furious, and his relations with Retinger were irreparably damaged.⁶⁹

The significance of this effort goes far beyond personalities, although Paderewski's ego was gargantuan while Retinger was both arrogant and often stupefyingly tactless. A real political division was reflected in the matter. Paderewski was committed to an allied victory in the war and supportive of Russia as an unavoidable concomitant. Retinger, like Conrad, could not support Paderewski's position which was functionally pro-Russian, and perhaps worse, anti-Austrian. Retinger's falling-out with Paderewski in 1915 — which, incidentally, seems to have been his major political activity in that year — was part of the gradual formation of Retinger's conception of the war and Poland's relationship to it which would only become clear in 1916.

67. Paderewski doubtless anticipated difficulties with Retinger. As early as December 1914 he stated his mistrust of Retinger — for political reasons apparently — and had been warning his supporters regarding him (Maciej Loret to [Stanisław Osada], December 21, 1914, in *Papiery Gaśiorowskiego*, sygn. 15266/II, Ossolineum, Wrocław).

68. This is the contention of Najder, whose knowledge of Conrad is unmatched (Najder, *Conrad: A Chronicle*, p. 406).

69. The *contretemps* between Paderewski and Retinger is mentioned in Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, pp. 21-23; this section does not appear in the earlier versions of Terlecki's essay on Retinger.

II.

Early in 1916 Retinger undertook another of his several wartime "missions." In February he suddenly arrived in the portion of Russian Poland just occupied by German and Austrian troops.⁷⁰ His appearance here was, *prima facie*, quite extraordinary. He came, ostensibly, to attend a meeting of the newly formed National Central Committee. One of this organization's founders, Karol Popiel, later disclosed this bizarre episode.⁷¹ Retinger, according to Popiel, explained to the Poles that he was traveling at the behest of the British government, and that he had come (via Switzerland) to "acquaint himself with political conditions in the occupied Kingdom [of Poland]." The similarity to Retinger's 1914 appearance before the American Poles in Chicago is striking. Popiel concluded that: "I did not need to make any inquiries to conclude that a man who, in time of war, can appear on the territory of a country occupied by the enemy, has definite, and appropriately high, organizational or political connections."⁷²

As was the case with his earlier visit to the Poles of America, this dramatic appearance followed a certain script. The hosts were not informed in advance of his arrival or the purposes of his mission. Retinger described himself as acting on behalf of the highest circles of the British government and claimed to be involved in political reconnaissance. Beyond these vagaries he said little or nothing and did not take the Poles, in either place, into his confidence.

This early 1916 mission is again difficult to reconstruct due to lack of sources, and many questions remain unanswered.⁷³ However, certain features

70. This episode, like so many in Retinger's career, remains murky. For example, Wapiński's otherwise well-researched biography of Retinger reports only that "in 1916 he [Retinger] arrived in the Congress Kingdom [i.e., Russian-ruled Poland] and established contact with the activist National Central Committee" (Wapiński, "Retinger," p. 149); Suleja omits the episode entirely.

71. Popiel's recollections, first reported by Aleksander Janta, are presented in Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, pp. 26-27.

72. Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, p. 27.

73. There is an intriguing remark in the unfortunately unreliable and tendentious work by Jędrzej Giertych, *Rola dziejowa Dmowskiego: Tom I: Rok 1914* [The Historic Role of Dmowski: Volume I: 1914] (Chicago: Towarzystwo imienia Romana Dmowskiego, 1968), which reads: "I learned from the lips of a Polish officer who during the war had Retinger's personal file [?] in his hands that, during the First World War, Retinger traveled from London to Cracow as an emissary [*Lącznik*] to establish contact with the legionnaire camp, (i.e., the Piłsudskiites) (see 53 n.). Retinger's relationship with the Piłsudski camp, then and later, is most intriguing, but very little evidence is available. For example, in May 1926 when Piłsudski took power in Poland via *coup d'état*, Retinger made efforts to convince the British that he represented a pro-British orientation and

are clear and important to emphasize to bring into relief the political pattern that is gradually emerging from Retinger's melodramatic international "diplomacy." First, the meeting Retinger attended was comprised of representatives of what, in the complex world of wartime Polish politics, was regarded as the "left independence" or "activist" faction. This was a congeries of groups which, as regards the war, were decidedly anti-Russian and willing to work with (hence the appellation "activist") the Central Powers for the purpose of reconstructing Polish independence. One of the hallmarks of their activities was the need for Polish armed units to fight against the Czar and hence, of necessity, on the side of Berlin and, more likely, Vienna. The most prominent member of this grouping was Józef Piłsudski, the famed leader of the Legions fighting against Russia under Austrian operational command since 1914. Thus, the CKN, whose meeting Retinger just attended, was the political antithesis of Paderewski and his friends at Vevey. Significantly, Popiel recalled that the man who brought Retinger to the Warsaw meeting was Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, then Piłsudski's most trusted lieutenant. There are a few additional scraps of evidence to suggest that Retinger was attempting to establish contact with the Piłsudskiite camp early in the war, and this 1916 appearance in Warsaw can be seen as part of this project. Indeed, ever since February 1915, Retinger had worked in London with August Zaleski who was favorably disposed towards Piłsudski and his Legions in Austrian Galicia. There is little doubt that Zaleski encouraged Retinger in a pro-Piłsudski and pro-"activist" direction.⁷⁴

Of course, how Retinger managed to cross several frontiers — both ways — in 1916 remains a central mystery, as does the validity of his claim that he was, in effect, a British agent assigned to canvass Polish issues. Perhaps an even more central question is not whether London sent Retinger, but *who* allowed him to cross into occupied territory? A convenient answer is that Vienna, or at least those with influence in Vienna, arranged for Retinger's visit, whether the British sent him or not. This would allow us to continue the assumption that Retinger has Austrian connections of some sort at least into 1916. The possibility of Retinger symbolizing, albeit in a small way, the notion of an Anglo-Austrian relationship is also intriguingly suggested.

This mysterious trip to Warsaw was the immediate prelude to Retinger's

thus betokened improved relations between London and Warsaw (Tadeusz Piszczykowski, *Anglia a Polska, 1914-1939: w świetle dokumentów brytyjskich* [England and Poland, 1914-1939: In Light of British Documents] (London: 1975), pp. 293-296.

74. Regarding Zaleski and Retinger, see Sukienicki, *ECE*, vol. 1, p. 205, vol. 2, p. 984 n. 15. For Zaleski's London activities, see Piotr Wandycz, *August Zaleski* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1980), p. 9ff. Wandycz, unfortunately, does not mention any Retinger-Zaleski contacts.

most significant wartime “diplomatic” endeavor: the attempt to arrange a separate peace between Great Britain and Austria-Hungary in 1916. In the same year, Retinger, often in conjunction with Conrad, dunned the Foreign Office with implausible proposals for the reconstruction of Poland. What historians have hitherto failed to realize is that these were not separate enterprises by Retinger but part of the same project. In 1916-1917, as would be the case later, he regarded Polish independence and more general schemes for European reorganization as inseparable and mutually supporting goals which could only be realized interdependently. Thus, although Retinger variously emphasized either the European — as against the more specifically Polish — aspects of his efforts, they were facets of the same project.

III.

In his memoirs, Retinger recalls that the initiative for his quixotic efforts to promote a separate peace to allow Vienna to leave the war came from the idiosyncratic French politician and social notable Boni de Castellane.⁷⁵ De Castellane was an ardent Catholic, and related by marriage to Polish noble families.⁷⁶ He had served in the French parliament for several terms, and his highly original, and essentially Catholic views of international problems were well-known in Europe in the years before the war.⁷⁷ By 1916, Castellane had become convinced that Austria was the essential element to stabilize Central Europe under Catholic auspices and create a barrier to Russian penetration of Europe. Moreover, a *rapprochement* between Catholic France and Catholic Austria would serve both countries' national interests while simultaneously advancing the Vatican's cause.⁷⁸ Retinger, who had met Castellane during his Paris years, introduced the Frenchman to Polish emigré politics and leaders,

75. Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, p. 39.

76. De Castellane's aunt, Elisabeth, married a Radziwiłł in 1857. As a result, Boni was related to several Potockis, and Branickis as well. Through unexplained family connections, he was related to Ksawery Count Orłowski and the German diplomat of Polish nationality, Hugo Prince Radolin (Emmanuel de Waresquel, editor, *Mémoires de Boni de Castellane, 1867-1932* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1986), pp. 27, 49-50, 117, 155-156, 263, 278, 292.

77. Heinrich Seeholzer, *Die Politik des Grafen Boni de Castellane* (Zurich: Leemann & Co., 1913).

78. “The Vatican had long considered the Austro-Hungarian Empire its strongest ally in Europe,” David Alvarez, “A German Agent at the Vatican: The Gerlach Affair,” *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1996), p. 345; see also Francis Latour, “De la spécificité de la diplomatie vaticane durant la grande guerre,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 43, no. 2 (April-June 1996), p. 360.

and won his sympathy for the Polish cause.⁷⁹ Retinger had briefly considered a priestly vocation, and was a devotee of the aristocratic Catholic circles in which de Castellane moved, and was a man with extraordinary connections among the Poles of Austria. Hence, de Castellane's notions about facilitating a separate peace for Austria was a most stimulating point of departure for the ambitious and resourceful Retinger.

Here, a number of political trends and personal acquaintances came together. Retinger was, by 1916, clearly an "Austrophile" as regards Polish politics, meaning that he envisioned some amelioration of Poland's situation, perhaps the regaining of independence, through collaboration with Vienna. Conrad shared this vision, and, like Retinger, wished to see a more active role for the Western allies in fostering the recreation of Poland.⁸⁰ It was this disposition which dictated their unwillingness to cooperate with the seemingly pro-Russian activities of Paderewski; it was also evident in Retinger's missions to the United States in 1915 and occupied Poland in 1916. In the former, he tried to discourage Polish-American efforts to raise a volunteer army which would fight against the Central Powers (possibly in conjunction with Russia). In the latter, Retinger tried to establish some contact with the so-called activist camp in Polish politics, i.e., those, like Pilsudski, who were working with the Central Powers — predominantly Austria — in Polish matters. Saving Austria by arranging a separate peace thus had a particular Polish motivation.

But merely allowing Austria to avoid destruction was just the beginning. De Castellane introduced Retinger to a host of Catholic aristocrats with Austrian ties — notably Prince Sixte de Bourbon-Parma.⁸¹ These would provide the conduit for the approach to Vienna. This circle would also provide candidates for a simultaneous plan: to determine a future monarch for a restored Polish kingdom. Retinger apparently discussed this widely at the time. Conrad suggested a British candidate be found as a link to London's support for Polish aspirations. However, Retinger's French friends suggested a Frenchman.⁸²

79. *Mémoires de Boni*, p. 362. De Castellane's recollections of Retinger are very brief. However, he also notes his being a *habitué*, during the war, of the home of the Edwards family, where *je voyais beaucoup d'hommes politiques*. Misia Edwards, nee Godebska, married to Alfred Edwards, co-founder of *Le Matin*, was Retinger's cousin and part of the family which had facilitated his introduction to western Europe in his Sorbonne days (*Mémoires*, pp. 340, 340 n.). The much-married Godebska is a character as fascinating as Retinger. She was variously a model for Renoir, Vuillard and Bonnard, and Coco Chanel's mentor. Her salon was attended by the most influential people in France.

80. See Retinger's remarks regarding Conrad — which are virtually about himself — in his *Conrad*, p. 171.

81. See Retinger's memoirs as reproduced in Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, p. 40.

82. Retinger, *Conrad*, p. 172.

De Castellane discussed a separate peace for Austria early in the war with the powerful political figure Joseph Caillaux. (Like Retinger, Boni was pro-Austrian, and anti-German, and also shared with the Pole a strong attachment to England.)⁸³ De Castellane cast his remarks in the context of close French cooperation with the Vatican in any effort in this regard which would, incidentally, also envision damaging Germany. Caillaux was, de Castellane concluded, impressed by his arguments.⁸⁴ Caillaux was known for his unorthodox political views and had been a controversial figure in French politics long before the war. By his own admission, Caillaux desired to arrange an early peace to save France, in contrast to the consuming dedication to victory associated with Clemenceau. Although regarded by many of his countrymen as a traitor, proponents of Caillaux have emphasized that his patriotism was incontrovertible, yet coupled with a broadly European orientation.⁸⁵ Caillaux was also a "prominent Catholic who shared the Holy Father's apprehensions . . . about a peace which would not *desarticuler* Europe's internal and external structure."⁸⁶ The notion of a Paris-Vienna Catholic axis around which to reconstruct Europe — a revival of the Kaunitzian system — which would reduce the power of parvenu Germany⁸⁷ and keep Russia at bay, would appeal to de Castellane, Caillaux, and the Austrian Pole Retinger.⁸⁸

83. *Mémoires de Boni*, pp. 11, 49, 151, 339, 370.

84. *Mémoires de Boni*, pp. 350-351.

85. For example, see Maurice Barrés, *En regardant au fond des crevasses* (Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, 1917), p. 13ff. For Caillaux's own explanation of his wartime vision, see his *Devant l'histoire: Mes prisons* (Paris: Editions de la Sirene, third edition, 1920), pp. 128, 337-350, and *Mes Mémoirs, III*, pp. 224-225. John M. Sherwood's argument that Caillaux was, in effect, a "created" traitor used by Clemenceau for partisan political purposes should be noted in this context (see his *Georges Mandel and the Third Republic* [Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1970], p. 23ff.).

86. Arno J. Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1964), p. 281. Attributing such Roman Catholic loyalties to Caillaux is problematical at best. Regarding Caillaux's religious views, see the lengthy and subtle presentation in Jean-Claude Allain, *Joseph Caillaux*, three volumes (Paris: Impremeire Nationale, 1978-1981), vol. 1, p. 94ff.

87. Caillaux specifically endorses the notion of strengthening Austria, and weakening Germany as a positive goal; see *Mes Mémoirs, III*, p. 192.

88. Circumstantial evidence suggests the possibility of a yet more complex series of personal and political linkages at work. De Castellane was very close to the Asquiths from the prewar era. Indeed, it is possible that he was the source of Retinger's seemingly instant acceptance by the Prime Minister. Further, Asquith had a very high opinion of Caillaux, which he vouchsafed to de Castellane (*Mé-*

Little is known concerning Caillaux's interest in Polish affairs during the war. However, late in 1916 he was one of the handful of French deputies urging a more vigorous Polish policy on his government.⁸⁹ This action by Caillaux regarding Poland was especially significant when we couple it with Retinger's claim in his memoirs that it was Caillaux who "originated the idea of an eventual candidature of Prince Sixte de Bourbon-Parma to the Polish crown."⁹⁰ De Castellane knew Sixte well and kept in touch with him throughout the war. Sixte, in turn, was a proponent of Austro-French cooperation, was militantly anti-German, and a devout Catholic. In addition, Sixte had been bruited as a possible candidate for the Albanian throne in 1912, and thus his availability for service was well-known in French circles.⁹¹ Hence we have a rather cloudy, yet nonetheless certain triangular relationship among Retinger and the two powerful and controversial French politicians de Castellane and Caillaux.⁹² A separate peace, Catholic politics, and Polish

(*Mémoirs de Boni*, p. 326).

89. Janusz Pajewski, *Wokół sprawy polskiej: Paryż - Lozanna - Londyn, 1914-1918* [Concerning the Polish Question: Paris - Lausanne - London, 1914-1918] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1970), pp. 52-53. It is not without significance that Caillaux was very close to Philippe Berthelot of the Foreign Ministry whom Retinger had met with upon his return from Austria in the summer of 1914 (Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years, 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924], vol. 2, p. 157).

90. Retinger, *Conrad*, pp. 172-173.

91. It should be noted that Sixte's principal motivation in 1916-1917 was to lessen Austria's dependence on Berlin and encourage Franco-Austrian cooperation, goals which were congruent with those of Austophile Poles (Phillipe Amiguet, *La vie du prince Sixte de Bourbon* [Paris: Les Editions de France, 1934], pp. 57ff, 93, 102ff).

92. Comparisons between Retinger and Caillaux are fascinating. Caillaux was regarded by many Frenchmen, especially those of the right, as being a traitor. His defenders, regard him as combining French patriotism with a larger, European view of affairs. He was a man of the left who nonetheless regarded the Roman Catholic Church with admiration, moved in powerful circles, had financial and political interests in South America, and was known for his sangfroid and sharp tongue. Retinger enjoyed a virtually identical position among Poles. For an important sympathetic *aperçu* of Caillaux, see Émile Roche, *Avec Joseph Caillaux: Mémoires, souvenirs et documents* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1980), especially the essay by Jacques Chastenet, "Joseph Caillaux: Un homme d'état aux vues prophétiques," pp. 33-40; compare Jean-Claude Allain, *Joseph Caillaux et la seconde crise marocaine* (Ph.D. thesis, Université de Paris, 1974), pp. 1, 13. Both had close connections with the Spanish diplomatic corps in western Europe and vague but significant Vatican ties (see Joseph Caillaux, *Devant l'histoire*, p. 210ff). Finally, and most bizarre, both had, or were reputed to

independence are all featured, though their interrelationship is quite unsure. The themes of international collaboration, monarchism, including preservation of the Habsburgs, and Vatican diplomacy are all elements of the intellectual context.

In the spring of 1916 Retinger began, at de Castellane's urging he later contended, "a thoroughly unofficial investigation of the possibilities of concluding a separate peace with Austria."⁹³ Retinger was convinced that before any action he had to consult with the British, although he provided no explanation for that decision. Hence early in 1916 he met with Asquith who, he contends, "had no objections."⁹⁴ Retinger later recollected, curiously, that he regarded the key to the whole enterprise was to "win over" the press magnate Lord Northcliffe; the reasons for this singularly odd determination he did not provide. In any event, using the intermediacy of Northcliffe's brother, Lord Rothmere, another of Retinger's endless list of convenient acquaintances, he met the irascible Northcliffe and gained his support.⁹⁵ Northcliffe instructed his foreign correspondents, especially the *Time's* man in Paris, Wickham Steed, to facilitate Retinger's efforts. As a result, Retinger met with Clemenceau, and Berthelot of the Foreign Ministry.⁹⁶ These meetings were less than auspicious as Retinger acknowledged that his solicitude for Austria was prompted by the Dual Monarchy's Catholicity, a feature of dubious merit

have, mysterious and highly significant connections to freemasonry. As regards Caillaux, see Charles Johnston, "Caillaux's Secret Power Through French Masonry," *New York Times*, February 24, 1918, section 7, p. 11. Caillaux, according to Wolfgang Steglich, had some contacts with German intelligence via members of the Grand Orient Lodge (Steglich, *Der Friedensappell Papst Benedikts XV, Vom 1. August 1917 und die Mittelmächte* [Wiesbaden: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 1970], pp. 439-440, 482), a claim which appears less farfetched if it is remembered that Caillaux himself once claimed that the only forces that really mattered in France were the church and masonry (*Mémoires de Boni*, p. 351). Retinger was often charged by opponents with Masonic connections: see Henryk Pajak, *Retinger, mason i agent syjonizmu* (Lublin: Retro, 1996), a very flawed volume.

93. Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, p. 39.

94. Pomian quotes Retinger's memoirs in *Pamiętniki*, p. 39.

95. Conveniently, Northcliffe was close to Joseph Conrad and Retinger was able to trade on the impressive network of his acquaintances (Conrad to Richard Curle, August 20, 1916, in G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), vol. 2, p. 173. Confirmation of Retinger's approach to Northcliffe is the letter the latter wrote which was "intercepted by the War Office and sent to the F.O." (Wilfried Fest, *Peace or Partition: The Habsburg Monarchy and British Policy, 1914-1918* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978], pp. 99, 99 n. 61).

96. Berthelot was part of the *salon* of Retinger's cousin Misia (Pomian, *Retinger*, p. 35).

to the atheist Clemenceau and the Protestant Berthelot. Despite this inauspicious inception, Retinger thence proceeded on his mission with what he regarded as Anglo-French blessing. The only corroboration we have of his memoirs for these actions is a frustratingly vague letter from Conrad to Richard Curle of August 20, 1916:

Retinger's activities go on at white heat — personal success immense, political what it can be and, indeed, better than one would have thought it possible in the hopeless state of the Polish question. He created for himself certain titles to a hearing by accomplishing a brilliant piece of work last month as an unofficial intermediary between the British and French Governments. In truth the position was delicate. But it's too long a story for this letter.⁹⁷

Through de Castellane Retinger met — though precisely when is unknown — with Prince Sixte and held a series of lengthy discussions with him.⁹⁸ The prince was the brother of Zita, wife of Emperor Charles of Austria-Hungary who had assumed the throne after Franz Josef's death in November 1916. Retinger however had a double track approach to the Habsburgs. His guardian, Zamoyski, had arranged a meeting in Switzerland between Retinger and the "Black Pope," the General of the Society of Jesus, Włodzimierz Count Ledóchowski, a fellow Pole. This linkage is significant because Ledóchowski was suspected by French intelligence of being the lynch-pin of the Vatican's efforts at pro-Central Powers diplomatic efforts. a late 1915 report concerning Ledóchowski accused him of "animating a vast pacifist organization . . . financed by Berlin and Vienna, which . . . disposes of many millions [of francs], [and] directs numerous Austrian, German, and Swiss agents."⁹⁹

Ledóchowski discouraged Retinger warning him that Vienna was so closely dependent upon Berlin that it was unable to act without Berlin's knowledge. For the next few months Retinger shuttled back and forth between Paris, London and Switzerland in pursuit of his diplomatic objectives. At some

97. Quoted in Jean-Aubry, *Life and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 174.

98. This account of Retinger's diplomatic *démarche* is based on his subsequent rather sketchy presentation as quoted in Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, pp. 40-41.

99. Quoted in Anne Lacroix-Riz, "Le Vatican et les buts de guerre germaniques de 1914 à 1918: le rêve d'une Europe allemande," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 42, no. 4 (October-December 1995), p. 530. Ironically, the Kaiser regarded Ledóchowski rather differently: the center of a Catholic, Austrian, and possibly Polish plot to ruin Germany. In early 1918, he wrote: "The whole unsavory Parma-Rome-Habsburg campaign of agitation is represented, inspired and directed by the Jesuit General Count Ledóchowski" [emphasis in original], quoted in Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), p. 434.

point, though the chronology is far from clear, he actually reached Vienna and held a number of meetings which I have been unable to trace. His principle interlocutor was Count Mensdorff-Pouilly, the former Austrian ambassador in Paris, and later himself an Austrian peace envoy. The substance of their conversations cannot be reconstructed, however. Their results were evidently disappointing.¹⁰⁰

German diplomats discovered that Retinger was meeting with Caillaux and traveling from France to Switzerland in April, June, September, and December of 1916, and in late March or early April of the next year. The Germans were highly suspicious and labeled Retinger "an English spy." However, the German consulate in Bern also reported that he was not trusted by the Poles in Switzerland, especially Roman Dmowski and the pro-Entente Polish political right.¹⁰¹ The Germans did not realize that this was an anomalous situation as Dmowski was the leader of the pro-Entente camp among the Polish emigrés. The evidence should have immediately called into question the determination that Retinger was simply "an English spy." Indeed, British intelligence in late 1916 confirmed that Retinger was unpopular with the largely pro-Entente Poles of Switzerland and suspected that he had Austrian connections.¹⁰² Conrad, who seems to have been kept reasonably abreast of Retinger's activities, was aware of the surreptitious and dangerous nature of his young

100. Retinger was not the only one to attempt the same network of relationships to arrange a separate peace. Bourbon pretenders, the "Black Pope," Habsburg court circles, and much clandestine to-ing and fro-ing in Switzerland was also the *modus operandi* of the Duchess d'Uzes at the behest of Aristide Briand of the French government (C. à Court Repington, *The First World War, 1914-1918: Personal Experiences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), vol. 2, pp. 210-211. Briand's dealings with the duchess, which lasted approximately from January through March 1917, are confirmed by his correspondence (Georges Suarez, *Briand: Sa vie - son oeuvre - avec son journal et de nombreux documents inédits. IV: Le Pilote dans la Tourments, 1916-1918* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1940), pp. 136-137, 143, 145-146. The activities of Anne de Rochechouart-Mortemart, Duchesse d'Uzes are particularly significant because she was closely involved with Polish affairs in Paris (Gasiorowski 1910-1915, p. 258). The duchess was also close to Boni de Castellane, Retinger's friend who, Retinger contended, first proposed to him the "peace mission" to the Austrian (de Castellane, *Mémoires*, p. 143, and Pomian Retinger, p. 39). She was, like Retinger, simultaneously associated with aristocratic and monarchist circles as well as the political left, whence her sobriquet *la duchesse rouge*. Hence, the possibility of her connections with Retinger — again via the intermediacy of Boni de Castellane — are obvious though I cannot establish a direct link.

101. Romberg to Bethmann Hollweg, April 2, 1917, as repeated to the Polizeipräsident in Posen via the Minister des Innern, April 20, 1917, in Polizeipräsidium, sygn. 2721, Wojewódzkie Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu.

102. Latawski, "Britain and the Rebirth," p. 141ff.

friend's activities, referring to him as having "put his head in a noose" for the Polish cause.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, Retinger's meetings with Caillaux — which would tie many ends together — remain very mysterious, although their authenticity was later confirmed by British intelligence as well.¹⁰⁴

In the summer of 1916 Retinger again came calling on the British Foreign Office. Those who have attempted to discuss his 1916-1917 actions do not seem to realize that these approaches were part of his larger effort to conclude a separate peace with Austria. This conclusion becomes clear if we examine closely what Retinger specifically presented to the British in 1916.

Retinger had induced Conrad to prepare a proposal for an "Anglo-French protectorate" over a "new Polish Commonwealth"; an effort to be undertaken "of course with the fullest concurrence of Russia." Poland was to be a "hereditary monarchy" and part of some rather vague Anglo-French alliance system. The future of this monarchy was defined against a background of presumed Polish hostility to *both* Germany and Russia. The compatibility with this scheme for Polish restoration, and the notions of an Anglo-French separate peace with Austria — arranged, notably, through essentially Polish channels — is striking. Unfortunately for Retinger, this grandiose project was virtually ignored at the Foreign Office which instantly recognized that an Anglo-French initiative regarding Poland would be utterly unacceptable to the Russians.¹⁰⁵

Retinger's frantic activities in 1916 had two ostensible motives: a separate peace for Austria, and the resurrection of Poland under Western auspices. It is intriguing to consider the possibility that Retinger's actions were inspired, if not coordinated, with a rising initiative regarding Poland undertaken by the Poles in Austria. In early 1916 leading Poles from all three parts of the partitioned country met in Cracow to discuss a reunited Poland under Habsburg

103. Quoted in an August 1916 letter from Conrad to NN in Retinger, *Conrad*, p. 177.

104. See Harold Nicolson's minute of September 20, 1918, FO 371-3282, document no. 158193, Public Record Office, Kew Gardens; hereafter PRO.

105. Sukiennicki, *ECE*, vol. 1, p. 216-217; compare Najder, *Conrad: A Chronicle*, pp. 416-417. It is notable that this 1916 effort is analogous to Retinger's 1914 attempt to convince London, somehow, to "guarantee" the promises made to the Poles by the Russian commander-in-chief, Grand Duke Nikolai. The memorandum expressing these views was titled "A Note on the Polish Problem" and was ostensibly the work of Joseph Conrad, although Retinger's inspiration, and perhaps far more, is widely acknowledged (Najder, *Conrad: A Chronicle*, pp. 416, 586 n. 67). The arguments of this memorandum — including a prophetic endorsement of a Polish-German border along the Odra — were adumbrated in 1915 in a pamphlet Retinger published in Paris titled *La Pologne et l'équilibre européen* (Bogusław Leśnorodski, "Conrad a sprawą niepodległości" [Conrad and the Case for Poland's Independence], pp. 354-355).

auspices, the so-called “Austrian solution” to Polish independence. The reborn country would not press major territorial demands against Germany, though it had extensive desiderata as regarded Russia. To advance this goal plans were made to establish propaganda bureaus throughout neutral countries.¹⁰⁶ Significantly, in early 1916 the most optimistic Polish proponents of a major Austrian move as regards the Polish issue were the leaders of the Cracow urban patriciate, Retinger’s ancestral millieu.¹⁰⁷

Given Retinger’s extensive connections in Austrian Poland, especially Cracow, it is difficult to believe he was unaware of this development which so perfectly explains his otherwise separate 1916-1917 initiatives. Unfortunately, I have been unable to establish a direct link between Retinger and the Cracow conference and its participants. Hence, we are again required to speculate based on suggestive, yet not definitive, evidence.

Retinger later admitted that he deluded himself into thinking he was playing a major role in international politics as a result of this complex, idiosyncratic and futile personal diplomacy of 1916-1917. Whereas it is impossible to discern any effect of Retinger’s actions on the powers’ actions at that time, the consequences of these melodramatic shenanigans for Retinger were considerable. His seemingly effortless travels across frontiers in wartime certainly suggested he was the servant of powerful forces. The frequent speculation that Retinger was an agent not only of the English, but perhaps a multiple agent, was certainly derived from this era.

Late 1916 was something of a watershed in Retinger’s activities. The available scraps of evidence suggest that he moved his activities from London to Paris. Retinger’s relationship with the foreign Office had been damaged as early as 1915 by accusations of Austrophilism. In 1916, Retinger was

106. There is a useful though now dated account in J. Lewin, “Die polnische Frage in Russland während des Weltkrieges,” pp. 421-422. Lewin reports a specific January 1916 meeting at which these plans were formulated. Lewin bases his conclusions on Russian intelligence reports which, he contends, highly agitated St. Petersburg in the first half of 1916. However exhaustively researched work by Włodzimierz Suleja makes it clear that various forms of the “Austrian solution” were under discussion for many months, though they reached a particularly intensive level in early 1916 (see his *Orientacja austro-polska w latach I wojny światowej [do aktu 5 listopada 1916 roku]* [The Austro-Polish Orientation During World War I {Until the act of November 5th, 1916}] [Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1992], esp. p. 204ff).

107. I have in mind here people like Władysław Leopold Jaworski, leader of the Cracow conservative (see Suleja, *Orientacja*, p. 266; compare Andrzej Pańkowicz, “Działalność ugrupowań prawicowych w Galicji 1914-1918” [Activities of Right-wing Groupings in Galicia, 1914-1918] in Michał Pułaski, editor, *W 70-lecie odzyskania niepodległości przez Polskę, 1918-1988* [On the Seventieth Anniversary of Poland’s Regaining Independence, 1918-1988] [Warsaw-Cracow: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991], pp. 145-156).

denounced by the pro-Entente Poles associated with Dmowski as "perhaps unwittingly being used for pro-Austrian purposes." M.I.5 was informed by the Foreign Office and Retinger was investigated. As a result, in December 1916 the Foreign Office decided to have no further contact with him.¹⁰⁸

IV.

Retinger's subsequent actions during the war remain most obscure. Here, personal elements may well have played the decisive role. Sometime in 1917 he endured a series of personal misfortunes: his first child was born but was soon discovered to have health problems; his marriage went into an irretrievable decline, ending in divorce; he began a lengthy affair with the singularly bizarre American adventuress Jane Anderson; his financial situation, always parlous, became so desperate that Conrad was required, surreptitiously, to subvent him. His manifold flings into international diplomacy had accomplished nothing and convinced many people that he was untrustworthy. His relationship with the British authorities had ended in failure, indeed, disaster. His memoirs speak of being abandoned and shunned by those whom he had trusted. In despair, he attempted suicide.¹⁰⁹

In late 1917 Retinger again made an attempt to play a role in the Polish aspects of international politics. His actions have been previously dismissed as additional examples of political mischief, the product of mere idiosyncrasy, or simply left unexplained. I am convinced, however, that they can be shown to be consistent with the motives herein attributed to him. Specifically, Retinger tried mightily to prevent the formation of a Polish volunteer army to fight on the side of the Entente.

This army project had long fascinated Poles of all political camps and many abortive efforts had been undertaken from the very beginning of the war to raise Polish units. However, by 1917, other than a few minor and disappointing efforts, the only serious specifically Polish units to appear in the war were the Legions associated with Austria and led by the charismatic Piłsudski. The Poles supporting the Entente were convinced that a Polish military force of substantial size, fighting alongside the Western Allies, would immeasurably increase the leverage of Polish emigré efforts to gain Allied support for the cause of Polish independence. Finally, after endless efforts, in the summer of 1917 the French government agreed to sponsor such a force, with the close cooperation of the British and the Americans. The army was to

108. Calder, *Britain and the Origins*, pp. 89-90; Latawski, "Great Britain and the Rebirth," p. 129.

109. There is also a report that he suffered a heart attack in this period (Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, pp. 30-35; Pomian, *Retinger*, p. 44. Retinger attempted suicide at least one additional time, in 1923 (Drohojowski, *Wspomnienia dyplomatyczne*, pp. 50-51).

be raised from the Polish population of the United States, officered largely by veterans of Polish nationality from the ranks of the fast collapsing Russian army, and raised largely with American financing. It would, after training in Canada, fight on the Western front. Political control would be by the Polish National Committee, an emigré political body dominated by the political right and led by Dmowski in Europe and Paderewski from his influential vantage point in the United States. For Retinger, the creation of such an army was disastrous. What he tried to do to stop it, and why he did this, are two fascinating themes which bring Retinger's whole World War I career into clear relief.

In the first months of 1917 Retinger was again in Switzerland working assiduously to undermine the efforts of Dmowski and specifically trying to prevent the organization of Polish recruitment for the army in Russia. According to the German consulate and their intelligence operatives in Switzerland, Retinger was well-financed and even recruited "agents" to travel to Russia to further his plans. The Germans did not know what to make of these reports and concluded that Retinger was merely an "English spy." His contact with British military representatives in Switzerland seemed to confirm this.¹¹⁰

What were the sources of Retinger's apparently considerable funds? Why would the British be interested in financing the subversion of a Polish military formation which, ostensibly, would be organized as an Allied force? Matters may become clearer if we place them in a larger context.

In January 1917 London reported the first, highly tentative, peace overtures from Vienna, made via an Austrian industrialist in Copenhagen. Prime Minister David Lloyd George told the American ambassador that he was convinced Vienna sincerely wished to leave the war as soon as possible.¹¹¹ Within Austria, Foreign Minister Count Ottokar Czernin told a Crown Council that Austria's desire to solve the Polish question by establishing Poland as part of the Empire would require negotiations with the Entente.¹¹² In April, Count Mensdorff, contending he was acting at the behest of Czernin, made more concrete overtures, and the British became first involved in the famous affair of Prince Sixte-Bourbon. Also in April, Retinger met with Caillaux and traveled to Switzerland; it was the latest in a series of visits since

110. Romberg (*Gesandtschaft in Bern*) to von Bethmann Hollweg, April 2, 1917, Polizeipräsidum, sygn. 2723 (hereafter PP, 2721), Wojewódzkie Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu [Provincial State Archives in Poznan], Poznan.

111. Walter Hines Page to Secretary of State, February 11, 1917, 763.72119 /488, RG 59, Microfilm 367: Records of the Department of State Relating to World War I and its Termination, roll 374, USNA.

112. "Protokoll des zu Baden am 12 Jänner 1917 abgehaltenen Ministerrates für gemeinsame Angelegenheiten unter dem Allehöchsten Vorsitze Seiner Majestät des Kaisers und Königs," in PAI K 1092a: Nachlass Czernin, Haus, Hof und Staatsarchiv (hereafter HHSA), Vienna.

the preceding spring which had been monitored by German intelligence.¹¹³

Sixte-Bourbon, who had met with Retinger in 1916 to discuss peace overtures to Austria, made his first efforts as a peace intermediary in January 1917. Privately, Czernin assured the Emperor that the time was perhaps propitious for some approach to Paris, as he anticipated the return to power there of Caillaux who would represent a "Peace Government."¹¹⁴ The fact that Czernin linked the possibilities of peace with France with Caillaux is highly intriguing, though the source of this speculation is unknown.¹¹⁵

When the French informed Lloyd George of this in April, "his commitment to a separate peace with Austria was total."¹¹⁶ Thus the efforts that Retinger had vainly attempted in 1916 — approaches to Sixte, cooperation with London, a link to Austria via Switzerland, meetings with Caillaux — seemed to be materializing the next year. Had his actions merely anticipated the 1917 developments, or in some way prepared the way for them? Again, the documentary evidence allows no conclusion.

By spring 1917, the War Cabinet in London was told that the Austrian press was seething with reports about peace overtures, a break with Germany, and that the reconstruction of Poland was acceptable to Vienna.¹¹⁷ Washington was considering the possibility of serving as a catalyst for secret negotiations between Vienna and the Western powers.¹¹⁸ Reports arrived in London of a direct peace offer from Vienna to be made in the Hague, or perhaps Stockholm. The Foreign Office showed a guarded interest,¹¹⁹ and interviewed

113. Romberg to Bethmann Hollweg, April 2, 1917, PP, 2721.

114. Czernin to Empress Zita, February 17, 1917, in Gottfried Zarnow, *Verbundet — Verraten!: Habsburgs Weg von Berlin nach Paris*, (Bern: Buchverlags-Aktien-Gesellschaft, 1936), third edition, p. 55; Wolfgang Steglich, *Die Freidenspolitik der Mittelmächte, 1917-1918* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1964), p. 423, n. 7.

115. Czernin only informed Zita that his information about Caillaux came from "good sources" [*"aus guter Quelle"*], Zarnow, *Verbundet*, p. 55.

116. V. H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 83-85.

117. "Draft memorandum," July 7, 1917, FO 371, 2864, p. 2; compare Egan (Copenhagen) to Secretary of State, April 1, 1917, 763.72119/532, RG 59, roll 374, USNA.

118. Lansing to Wilson, March 17, 1917, 763.72119/544a, RG 59, roll 374, USNA.

119. Notably, the man rumored ready to undertake the peace initiative was Adam Count Tarnowski, like Retinger an Austrian Pole (Sir W. Townley to the Foreign Office, August 22, 1917; Townley to FO, August 23, 1917, FO 371 2864, p. 35, pp. 37-38; see also the attached minutes on p. 36 PRO; compare Stanisław Koźmian, Podczas czteroletni wojny, sygn. 8533 I, entry for August 11, 1917, p. 155, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego: Dział Rękopisów [Library of the

Sixte-Bourbon when he visited London at the end of spring.¹²⁰ It should be recalled that British involvement in these *pourparlers* was highly secretive: the Foreign Office was generally not apprised of the negotiations which Lloyd George pursued as “a behind-the-scenes intrigue with a shadowy outsider.”¹²¹

In late summer, the British envoy to Switzerland noted that an Austrian diplomat — the Pole, Władysław Count Skrzynski — was trying to urge the Polish emigré network in Switzerland to remain neutral in order to aid Vienna’s efforts at improving relations with the Western Powers.¹²² Efforts were reportedly underway to convince the Poles to assent to the notion of a Habsburg candidate for the Polish throne, the Archduke Charles Stephen.¹²³ Emperor Charles privately assured Polish politicians in Vienna that he favored “trialism,” i.e., the reconstruction of the Habsburg Empire with a third, Polish, member.¹²⁴ Charles Stephen, ostensibly a candidate for the throne of a restored Poland linked to Austria, lamented that Poles in the West were actively harming the Polish cause by efforts to create a volunteer military force, and specifically noted the malign influence of the pro-Entente Dmowski.¹²⁵

News that a Polish Army was being organized in France was similarly alarming to the leaders of the Austrophile camp in Galicia, who reacted by urging redoubled efforts to advance the goal of pushing Vienna to take steps regarding Poland.¹²⁶ Retinger’s efforts in Switzerland logically complement

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120. Rothwell, *British War Aims*, p. 11.

121. Quoted in Rothwell, *British War Aims*, p. 116.

122. Rumbold to Foreign Office, August 11, 1917, FO 371 2864, p. 23, PRO. Skrzynski even held a highly secret meeting with Dmowski in August 1917 to try to sway him regarding Austria but failed and concluded that Dmowski and his faction were inveterately opposed to the Monarchy (Pajewski, *Wokół sprawy polskiej*, pp. 146-148).

123. E. Howard to FO, August 13, 1917, a message circulated to the King and the War Cabinet, FO 371 2864, p. 417, PRO.

124. Kozmian: Podczas czteroletni wojny, sygn. 8532. Rozdział [Chapter] 114-139, entry for May 26, 1917, p. 585, BUJ.

125. The remarks were part of a long conversation the archduke had with Stanisław Koźmian, a leading conservative Pole (see Koźmian’s diary entry in sygn. 8533 I, Chaps. 140-165, entry for July 7, 1917, p. 29, BUJ).

126. In July 1917 Sikorski prepared a memorandum urging renewed efforts by the Poles of Galicia in light of the reports of the Polish Army in France (untitled Sikorski document in Materiały Michała Bobrzyńskiego do dziejów I wojny światowej. Formowanie się państwa polskiego, 1917-1919 [Materials of Michał Bobrzyński Regarding the History of the First World War: The Formation of the

the notions of a separate peace and an associated reconstruction of Austria along trialist lines, including a restored Poland. Moreover, his opposition to the Polish Army project would facilitate Austrophile efforts to win over the Poles and avoid a final break with Vienna.

By fall, however, the efforts of Prince Sixte-Bourbon had proved fruitless. New possibilities, however, arose in November when Skrzyński told the British in Bern that Czernin sought a high-level meeting. The result was a December meeting between General Jan Christiaan Smuts of the Imperial General Staff and Count Mensdorff in Switzerland. Mensdorff was a noteworthy choice as he had been in Switzerland in March during the tentative Franco-Austrian negotiations of Prince Sixte-Bourbon. Mensdorff raised the Polish issue as central, to which Smuts responded that, should the Habsburgs really break with Berlin, the Austro-Polish solution would be favorably greeted in London.¹²⁷

Over the next several weeks, London rapidly evolved a policy towards Austria which envisioned “extensive concessions” including specific support for the so-called Austrian solution to the Polish question. Despite this, the second planned meeting between Smuts and Mensdorff never occurred and by late spring the prospect of a separate peace with Austria disappeared from the British diplomatic agenda as it had earlier from the French.¹²⁸ How serious was the possibility that these high-level secret negotiations would lead to peace remains doubtful.¹²⁹

In fine, in the first months of 1917 two possibilities were widely bruited: a separate peace for Austria, and a major initiative regarding Poland by Vienna. For those Poles who, like Retinger, saw the restoration of Polish independence in collaboration with Austria, this was perhaps the critical moment in the war. The imperial court was sending clear signals that it had positive plans for Poland but required some reciprocity, especially from the Polish emigrés in western Europe, like Dmowski, who were actively pushing Polish opinion into an unfriendly direction. At the center was the prospective Polish Army, especially one built in good part on the basis of officers recruited in

Polish State, 1917-1919], sygn. 8121 III, BUJ.

127. Mensdorff to Czernin, December 19, 1917, PAI K 1092a: Nachlass Czernin, HHSA. Regarding the Polish aspects of these negotiations, see the discussion in Pajewski, *Wokół sprawy polskiej*, p. 153ff.

128. In March 1918 Philip Henry Kerr (later Lord Lothian) met with Skrzyński in Switzerland, but the talks were fruitless (Pajewski *Wokół sprawy polskiej*, p. 161ff; Rothwell, *British War Aims*, pp. 160-171).

129. The key work in this regard is still probably Robert A. Kann, *Die Sixtusaffäre und die geheimen Friedensverhandlungen Österreich-Ungarns im ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1966), esp. p. 75ff. Kann does not mention Retinger or Caillaux in this work.

Russia. In fact, although the army took form on the basis of a decree of the French government on June 4, 1917, it was clear that the instigation for it had involved Russian military representatives, and the project enjoyed the support of the Russian General Staff.¹³⁰ Thus the Polish Army in the West had a clearly Russian origin. This alone would make it not only suspect but also anathema to Austrophile Poles.

Given the many close relationships Retinger had with leading Polish political circles in Austria, it is certain that he must have been aware that a decisive moment had been reached; hence Retinger's efforts to block the Polish army. His efforts were protean, if ineffective. In May, 1917, for example, Retinger sent the Foreign Office a rather fanciful proposal suggesting that London encourage the Americans to raise a large force of many divisions and send it across Siberia to join with a Polish nucleus winnowed from the collapsing Russian imperial forces. The result would be a reinvigorated Eastern Front with an American-Polish nucleus. At first this seems a most peculiar proposal to come from Retinger as it would involve Poles in direct military confrontation with the Central Powers, obviously anathema to an Austro-Polish orientation. However, if we look more closely at the proposal — which was given some attention by the Foreign Office before being rejected — it would have anchored the Poles of Russia there for a very considerable time (London estimated at least six months) awaiting a slowly forming American contingent. If the Poles in Russia were to await the Americans, they could not be available to aid the Polish Army forming in France. Thus, this would have delayed Polish participation in a military force to be used against the Austrians, and gained Retinger and his cause a temporary delay.¹³¹

He campaigned tirelessly against the Polish Army project in 1917, earning the loathing of Dmowski and the *Komitet Narodowy Polski* [Polish National

130. A very important document in this regard is "Protokół z posiedzenia pełnego Wydziału Narodowego PCKR w Ameryce, Nr. 55" [Protocol of the Meeting of the Plenary Meeting of the National Department of the PCKR in America, No. 55], December 11, 1917, in *Papiery Gaśnorowskiego*, sygn. 15226/II, Ossolineum. Compare Miroslaw Francic, "Entre la France et les Etats-Unis: Le Cas de Wacław Gaśnorowski pendant la première guerre mondiale," and Marian Zgórniak, "L'Armée polonaise en France, 1917-1919" in Marian Zgórniak, editor, *Studia Gallo-Polonica* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988, vol. 1, pp. 93-94, 99. It is perhaps worth noting that Izwolsky, the Russian ambassador to Paris, a central figure in this effort, was despised by Retinger's important French friend Boni de Castellane, who regarded Izwosky as "*un moujik*" and "*une âme haineuse*" (*Mémoires de Boni*, p. 335).

131. Retinger to Foreign Office, May 7, 1917, and minutes of May 8, 1917; Foreign Office to Director, Military Intelligence, May 26, 1917, FO 371: 3003-97976, -98066, PRO.

Committee - KNP].¹³² Reports from KNP members indicate that Retinger was battling for influence in Paris against Dmowski and his entourage. However, since the French openly proclaimed their support of the Polish Army in June 1917, Retinger's efforts were foredoomed; indeed, they destroyed his position in both London and Paris.

Retinger's 1917 activities regarding the nascent Polish Army in France were motivated by his desire to keep alive the prospect of a separate peace for Austria, a separate peace which would be linked to the re-establishment of Poland as a third element in a reconstituted Habsburg empire, in short, the "Austro-Polish solution." By 1917, however, Retinger's actions on behalf of Austrian interest — or perhaps on behalf of *Polish* Austrian interests — had become very dangerous. This was the decisive year in the evolution of the international politics of the Polish Question, the year in which the western powers, including the United States, had made the restoration of Poland a war aim, and they had recognized one faction within Polish politics, namely Dmowski's KNP, as the country's exclusive representative. Retinger's position had been, thereby, rendered impossible, and his influence in London was replaced by another Pole, notably similar in background, who reflected this new Polish policy of the western powers. Hence, by late 1917, Jan Maria Horodyski, an Austrian Polish nobleman, with manifold international connections, had become an influential advisor to the British government regarding Polish matters. He also became, it would seem, a British spy.¹³³ Horodyski was closely associated with the Dmowski-Paderewski faction in Polish politics and thus was a sworn enemy of Retinger's Austrophilism. Both Retinger and the British policy towards Austrian problems he represented had been supplanted by Horodyski.¹³⁴

By October 1917, Retinger was denied re-entry to England and thus marooned on the continent.¹³⁵ Furthermore, his agitation against the Polish Army had resulted in his eviction from France.¹³⁶ He had been, according to the Foreign Office, "found out." Moreover, London knew that he had been well-supplied with money in 1917 — as the German consulate in Switzerland confirmed — but had not been able to ascertain the source. Harold Nicolson

132. Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, p. 31; compare Jan Zamorski, "Pamiętniki," sygn. 9075 III, BUJ, entry for October 1917, vol. 23, p. 7.

133. Paul Latawski, "Count Horodyski's Plan 'To Set Europe Ablaze,'" June 1918," *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 65, no. 3 (July 1987), p. 391ff. Horodyski was as ardent an opponent of a separate peace with Vienna as Retinger was its proponent (Norman Davies, "The Poles in Great Britain, 1914-1919," *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 50, no. 118 [January 1972], p. 79).

134. Latawski, "Britain and the Rebirth," p. 131ff.

135. Zamorski, "Pamiętniki," vol. 23, p. 7.

136. Suleja, "Szara eminencja," p. 157.

of the Foreign Office suspected that Retinger's funds came from French sources, specifically Caillaux; he concluded that Retinger was simply "an international spy."¹³⁷

Integrating the reported Austrian peace initiative of 1917 (especially its Polish aspects) with Nicolson's comments allows some very interesting deductions. Obviously, Retinger was not on His Majesty's business in Switzerland in the summer of 1917, as the German consulate in Bern assumed. Just as obviously, London was not the source of his considerable funds. Moreover, his actions were hardly in concert with British policy at the time regarding a Polish Army; they were directly contrary. Indeed, Eric Drummond of the Foreign Office had decided to break off contact with Retinger already in December 1916, although he received various memoranda from him thereafter.¹³⁸ Finally, some of the Austrians prominently associated with the peace bid were Retinger's fellow Poles, drawn from his social milieu. hence, three possibilities arise. The first is that Retinger was acting as an Austrian agent in 1917, or at least an agent of pro-Austrian Poles who combined a vision of a restored Poland with loyalty to the Dual Empire. This was essentially the position Conrad had assumed at the war's outbreak, and it was more or less what Retinger had espoused then and later.¹³⁹

A second, though distant, possibility suggests itself. Rothwell has underscored that the 1917 peace pourparlers between London and Vienna were very much a matter of Lloyd George's personal diplomacy. He always preferred confidential envoys and secret intrigue to normal diplomatic procedure whose practitioners he despised. Is it possible that Retinger was acting as the Prime Minister's *personal* representative in his activities in Switzerland? Analogously, Retinger had claimed that he had been Prime Minister Asquith's *personal* agent when he came to the United States late in 1914. We know that the Foreign Office was furious about its exclusion from the peace discussions in Switzerland, and that Lloyd George on one occasion during this period even took the extraordinary step of preventing minutes from being

137. Nicolson minute of September 20, 1918, FO 371-3282, doc. no. 158193, PRO. The putative Caillaux connection is fundamental here: As David French noted, the Foreign Office hated and feared Caillaux since long before the war. Any connection with Caillaux would make Retinger anathema (French, *British Strategy & War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 9-10, 62, 110, 142, 166-167, 183. Retinger's Polish political rivals were surprised by his sudden fall from grace in London and could not understand how Asquith, with whom Retinger was known to be close, could not protect him. That he was suspected of collusion with Vienna was their only conclusion (Zamorski, "Pamiętniki," sygn. 9075 III, p. 7 BUJ).

138. Calder, *Britain and the Origins*, pp. 89-90.

139. Giertych suggested the Retinger-as-Austrian-agent hypothesis some time ago (Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," p. 181).

taken at the War Cabinet meeting.¹⁴⁰ Here, however, we are definitely dealing in speculation as no records exist.

The third possibility begins with the assumption that both German sources in Switzerland and Nicolson's reconnaissance in Paris were correct in connecting Retinger with Caillaux. The latter, let it be remembered, was accused in 1917 of seeking to negotiate with the Central Powers to arrange an early French exit from the war.¹⁴¹ Collaboration between Caillaux and Retinger is not impossible — they had some dealings at least in 1916 — but no documents attesting to their specific relationship have ever appeared.¹⁴² Nonetheless, there is a fascinating conjectural trail of connections which deserves consideration.

Switzerland was the center of virtually all of the 1916-1917 peace overtures, from the Mensdorff mission to Retinger's meetings with Ledóchowski. In Bern, the Pole Skrzyński was part of the Habsburg delegation to the Vatican. British and German intelligence both noted Retinger's frequent visits to Switzerland, and both connected him with Caillaux.¹⁴³ Ledóchowski, we know from French sources, was close to Skrzyński, and played a role in the tentative efforts of Sixte-Bourbon. The Vatican secretary of State's office also met with Caillaux or his representatives at this time regarding peace overtures.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, as noted earlier, Retinger's 1917 efforts to block the creation of a Polish army made him *persona odiosa* with the pro-Entente Poles in Switzerland, especially the powerful Dmowski, yet they coincided perfectly with Vienna's efforts, epitomized by Skrzyński, to win over Polish emigrés of western Europe.¹⁴⁵

140. Rothwell, *British War Aims*, p. 164.

141. Caillaux's secret wartime diplomacy, including known contacts with representatives of the Central Powers in Switzerland, is still largely a mystery (see the frustrated remarks of Guy Pedroncini in *Les négociations secrètes pendant la grande guerre* [Paris: Flammarion, 1969], p. 53ff).

142. Caillaux does not mention Retinger in his lengthy apologia (Caillaux, *Devant l'histoire* nor in his memoirs written long afterwards (*Mes mémoires: III: Clairvoyance et force d'âme dans les épreuves, 1912-1930* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1947).

143. Caillaux apparently met with Mihály Count Károlyi, the Hungarian statesman, in Switzerland in August 1917 to discuss a separate peace ("Reports Karolyi in Peace Plot," *New York Times*, October 12, 1917, p. 3).

144. Regarding both the Ledóchowski-Skrzyński connection and the contacts between Caillaux and the Vatican's Secretary of State, see Lacroix-Riz, "Le Vatican," p. 530ff.

145. Regarding Skrzyński's role in these affairs, see the documents assembled by Janusz Pajewski in "Politycy polscy w relacjach dyplomatycznych francuskich" [Polish Politicians in French Diplomatic Reports], *Dzieje Najnowsze*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1974), pp. 209-213.

What was the source of Retinger's lavish funds expended in Switzerland — funds of which the British and Germans were equally unaware and equally surprised? These funds, be it noted, vanished suddenly in late 1917, leaving Retinger destitute. At this same time, he became *persona non grata* with the French. This collapse of his fortunes, literally and figuratively, coincides precisely with the arrest of Caillaux, ostensibly on charges of treason. Over the next few weeks a vast network of agents and activities was unearthed, all financially linked to Caillaux.¹⁴⁶ Retinger's name was never mentioned in the press reports or the several trials of Caillaux's putative confederates. Despite this, British sources reported that in Paris Retinger "was reputed to be an agent of Caillaux."¹⁴⁷ Hence, we may offer the tentative hypothesis that Retinger was, indeed, connected with Caillaux, and that the latter's catastrophe in 1917 brought about Retinger's disaster. Thus, a connection with Caillaux would explain the sudden and dramatic end to Retinger's wartime career. In 1917, he was reported, by both British and German sources, to be very well financed. By 1918, however, he was literally destitute and living on charity, probably Conrad's. He was driven from France and refused entry into England. This would doubtless be the fate of someone who had been connected with Caillaux, "the most hated man in France," whose arrest and trial were pursued with a merciless vengeance by Clemenceau, driving the pro-Caillaux forces into disgrace,¹⁴⁸ and creating "an atmosphere supercharged with fear, suspicion, and animosity."¹⁴⁹ Clemenceau's victory and Caillaux's fall coincided with the final consolidation of Polish emigré politics. Dmowski, by late 1917, had

146. Regarding Caillaux's supposed network, see the useful, though intemperately partisan, contemporary account, "The Caillaux Case," in *The New York Times: Magazine Section*, January 20, 1918; the vitriolic L. Marcellin, *Politique et politiciens pendant la guerre* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, n. d. [1924], vol. 2, pp. 29, 37, 39-40, 167ff, 193, 262-315; Roger de Fleurieu, *Joseph Caillaux au cours d'un demi-siècle de notre histoire* (Paris: Raymond Clavreuil [1951]), pp. 216-217; and the highly detailed work by Georges Suarez, *Briand: Sa vie - son œuvre - avec son journal et de nombreux documents inédits. III: Le Pilot dans la Tourmente, 1914-1916* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1939), p. 392ff. as regards the elaborate Italian aspect of Caillaux's actions, see the apologia by Filippo Cavallini, *Il Processo Cavallini: Storia di un delitto giudiziario* (Milan: Modernissima: Casa Editrice Italiana, 1921). Notably, none of these accounts mentions Retinger.

147. Nicolson minute, September 18, 1918, FO 371, 3282, PRO.

148. Retinger recollects that late in 1917 Georges Mandel, Clemenceau's "right hand," personally denounced the Pole to the "Tiger" (Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, p. 46). By the end of that year, the American press reported regularly concerning the hatred in France for Caillaux (for example, *New York Times*, December 17, 1917, p. 3).

149. Sherwood, *Mandel*, p. 22; compare Malcolm Anderson, *Conservative Politics in France* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), pp. 47, 67.

gained recognition for his Polish National Committee as a virtual provisional government in exile, a “government which enjoyed the recognition of most of the organized Polish community worldwide, especially in the United States, where Paderewski dominated Polish affairs. Austria was in thrall to Berlin, incapable of independent diplomatic initiative, and approaching dissolution.”¹⁵⁰ Efforts by the Vatican to arrange a negotiated end to the war were bootless, as Woodrow Wilson was determined that “the role of mediator should go to only one nation and one leader — the United States and himself.”¹⁵¹ The structure of the world in which Retinger had launched his vain, quixotic, and shadowy efforts had collapsed. On a personal level, he was supplanted by Horodyski in London, and had become a pariah in Western diplomatic circles. Nonetheless, the Germans regarded him as a British spy, while London seemed equally sure he was spying for others, perhaps, *mirabile dictu*, the Japanese.¹⁵²

Even the putative Retinger-Caillaux connection may disclose but part of the complex picture. The great missing piece which may knit together so many threads is Vatican diplomacy. Retinger, Skrzyński, de Castellane, Zamoyski, Caillaux, to say nothing of Ledóchowski, all had clear links to the Vatican. The correspondence between the Pope and the devoutly religious Austrian imperial couple, Charles and Zita, regarding peace, and the future of Central Europe, is well-known.¹⁵³ Certainly ascribing a large role to the Vatican provides a triple context to Retinger’s activities. First it furnishes an intellectual matrix, a common framework, in which a disparate group of many nationalities could work together with certain fundamental shared values.¹⁵⁴

150. Gary W. Shafafelt, *The Secret Enemy: Austria-Hungary and the German Alliance, 1914-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 183.

151. Constantine Peter Soustos, “Vatican Peace Diplomacy During World War I” (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1992), p. 115.

152. Documents supposedly implicating Retinger with the Japanese were seized from him in 1917 by M.I. 5 (Ciechanowski, “Retinger w świetle raportów,” p. 201).

153. See Giorgio Rumi, “Correspondenza fra Benedetto XV e Carlo I D’Asburgo” in Giorgio Rumi, editor, *Benedetto XV e la pace - 1918* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 1990), p. 19ff.

154. This also applies to matters of internal Polish politics. Whereas Retinger’s pro-Austrian sympathies would give him a common perspective with the Vatican, the anti-Central Powers orientation of the Dmowski camp made their approaches to the Vatican difficult until the Habsburgs were clearly *in articulo mortis*; see the useful essay by Stanisław Sierpowski, “Benedetto XV e la questione polacca negli anni della ‘Grande Guerra’” in Rumi, *Benedetto XV*, pp. 213-232. Also important are Dmowski’s observations in Roman Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa* [Polish Policy and the Rebuilding of the State] (Warsaw: 1928), p. 208f.

Second, the abundant but mysterious monies that seem to have been available would be conveniently attributable to Vatican sources. Finally, the diplomatic machinery of the Vatican immediately becomes the network which allows explanation for what are otherwise the strange movements of Retinger (among others), who often seemed to cross frontiers effortlessly.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, if the secret of Retinger's actions can be uncovered only by exposing the structure of the most intimate connections of Vatican diplomacy during the Great War, we shall wait long for the answer.

V. Conclusions

Józef Retinger is one of the most controversial and mysterious figures in modern Polish, indeed, European affairs. His long career was spent on the fringes of great events, in proximity to history's central actors. Never a major player himself, he was, in the analogy of Kajetan Morawski, content with the role of director and stage prompter.¹⁵⁶ A less kindly, though far more entertaining, evaluation was provided by Malcolm Muggeridge, who deemed Retinger: "A Metternich of S.W. 1, a Machiavelli of the Inner Circle, a Talleyrand of Notting Hill."¹⁵⁷ Explanations concerning Retinger can be classified under three headings: the British agent school, which emphasizes his strange World War II actions;¹⁵⁸ the unscrupulous adventurer school, most strongly represented by Siemaszko;¹⁵⁹ and the third, which we might deem the

155. Retinger, like Horodyski later, made Switzerland the center of his activities and worked closely with Ledóchowski. The importance of Switzerland and Ledóchowski for the Vatican's pro-Austrian efforts vis-a-vis the Poles is indicated by Lacroix-Riz, "Le Vatican et les buts de guerre germaniques," pp. 517-555, esp. 539.

156. Morawski's analysis is discussed in Ciechanowski, "Retinger w świetle raportów," p. 199.

157. The quotation from Muggeridge is in Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," p. 184.

158. Lerski notes that in 1941 many Poles regarded Retinger as having already "spent some thirty years in the British intelligence service" (*Poland's Secret Envoy*, p. 53. Compare the important letter of Jan Nowak, June 8, 1982, published in *Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 61 (1982), pp. 237-238.

159. Siemaszko, "Retinger w Polsce," pp. 56-115, as well as his "Szara eminencja." Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, an acute and worthy observer, regards Retinger as little more than a mysterious scoundrel whose actions were deleterious to Poland (*W takim zyliśmy świecie: Sylwetki polityków* [We Lived in Such a World: Political Profiles] (Cracow: Znak, 1990), pp. 138-139. Other contemporary Polish political figures, for example Herman Lieberman, regarded Retinger as "unreliable, perhaps a rascal" [*niew pewny, prawie łobuz*] (Witos, *Moja tulaczka*, p. 566).

"*cui bono?*" faction for whom Retinger's actions simply defy explanation.¹⁶⁰ The essential purpose of this article is to suggest another explanation for Retinger, and more importantly, another place to look for that explanation. We may conclude the following:

1. Retinger was not simply a British agent during the First World War. He may well have undertaken certain actions at London's behest — the 1914 visit to the United States is the most likely example. but, insofar as Retinger worked for British interests, he was doing so *ad hoc* and probably as a personal emissary of the Prime Minister (Asquith, later Lloyd George, perhaps Churchill still later, though that is a different story), not as an operative of the Foreign Office or M.I. 5. Retinger's purposes in these activities were always to serve his own view of Polish interests (about which more later), and not British policy regarding Poland. Whatever clandestine relations Retinger had with the British certainly came to an end by 1917, although they may well have recommenced later, perhaps in the 1920s.¹⁶¹

2. Retinger was connected with Caillaux in 1916-1917. The latter is the probable source for Retinger's fund in that period. however, Caillaux's activities regarding international diplomacy — of which Retinger was a likely part — are still very little known, despite Jean-Claude Allain's herculean efforts at reconstruction. Both British and German intelligence linked Retinger to Caillaux. Certainly a separate peace preserving Austria, safeguarding the interests of the Catholic nations of Europe, and weakening aggressive Germany — especially one which involved some possibility of a French candidate for a reconstituted Polish kingdom — would be a logical and attractive cause to enlist Retinger. Further research into the international activities of Caillaux is the most likely potential source of important revelations about Retinger. Caillaux always defended his actions on the grounds that he was a patriot who sought only "European conciliation," a goal which would later describe Retinger's own actions after World War II.¹⁶² However, given the highly secret nature of these activities, the likelihood that abundant materials will be unearthed is not very good. The Caillaux-Retinger

160. For example, Drohojowski, *Wspomnienia dyplomatyczne*, p. 50ff. Even Sikorski was apparently frequently exasperated by Retinger, exclaiming once: "I do not know for whom he is working!" (quoted in Stanisław Kot, *Listy z Rosji do Gen. Sikorskiego* [Letter from Russia to Gen. Sikorski] [London: Jutro Polski, 1955], p. 536). In 1989 two Polish historians concluded that we still do know "who he really was," and that we shall probably have a long wait to find out (Mazur and Ostrowski, "Przyczynek," p. 621).

161. By 1926 Retinger had good relations with Gregory of the Foreign Office, though he was still *persona non grata* with others there (Piszczkowski, *Anglia a Polska*, p. 294).

162. "Caillaux Denies Dealing with Foe," *New York Times*, February 21, 1920, p. 3.

relationship was probably part of a network of connections involving, at the minimum, Boni de Castellane, Prince Sixte de Bourbon, possibly the Duchess d'Uzes, and perhaps Retinger's "godfather," Władysław Zamoyski. The degree to which Vatican diplomacy can be factored in remains a tantalizing possibility. This, however, is but speculation.

3. Retinger was a patriotic Pole who worked for the reconstruction of his ancestral homeland and tried to interest the Western powers in championing the Polish cause. In this effort, he regarded Russia and Germany as enemies, and the Habsburg empire as, at worst, neutral and, at best, possibly friendly. He was also convinced that Poland's security required the active support of the Western powers, particularly England. Efforts to involve the British in Polish affairs run like a red thread through all of Retinger's actions.

4. Retinger had an essentially pre-modern geopolitical vision of the world. He was Jesuit-trained in youth, and had been envisioned for the priesthood. His formative influences were Catholic, and aristocratic — attributes of the habitués of an international society of family, tradition and faith. His intellectual world was alien to the modern passions of both nationalism and class warfare. His Polish political connections were with the aristocratic, conservative circles, *and* the left, both, I should argue, essentially integrating political traditions in opposition to the nationalist right, which was hostile to both socialism and tradition, and envisioned a modern Poland based on bourgeois values: rational, post-Catholic, and free of ties to history. Retinger was conservative, not nationalist, a differentiation fundamental to Polish politics.

5. Retinger was Austrophile because he saw the Habsburgs as the best available alternative for Poland in central Europe. By comparison, a Russian victory was anathema to him, and Berlin's domination perhaps just as bad. The Habsburg empire's dissolution, with nationalist passions consuming the area would be worst of all. Hence, I should argue that Retinger was not emotionally *Kaisertreu* but supported the Austrians for reasons of rational geopolitical analysis. In this, he clearly anticipated his later activities. In World War I he worked for some international settlement which would preserve order, avoid either Russian or German domination of Europe, and prevent the passions of the modern world from creating chaos. The preserved world would be all the better if it could include a restored Poland as an element of international equilibrium. In 1916-1917 Retinger propagated the idea of a Polish "buffer" against German expansion which would thus serve both Western and, perhaps surprisingly, Russian interests.¹⁶³ Here Retinger's

163. See Retinger's brochure *La Pologne et l'équilibre européen* (Paris: 1916), an earlier version of which was published in the Paris *Midi* March 7, 1916 (compare Wiesław Ślądowski, *Opinia publiczna we Francji wobec sprawy polskiej w latach 1914-1918* [Public Opinion in France Regarding the Polish Question in the Years 1914-1918] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976), p. 126).

cosmopolitan Catholic background played a role in directing his thought: in the world of 1914-1918, the Vatican was the obvious international agency to aid in stabilizing the international system.

6. Situating Retinger in the Polish political landscape is rather problematical. Certainly, the wartime reports that he was a man of the right and even a pro-Russian "Moscophile" are completely wrong.¹⁶⁴ Retinger shared many of the beliefs of the Piłsudskiite camp in Polish politics: His essential political orientation was to the left.¹⁶⁵ He was anti-Russian regarding the war, and suspicious of the Germans. He wished to work closely with the Western powers in order to increase Polish abilities to resist Russian or German pressure. His attitude towards Austria, however, was very different from the usual Piłsudskiite's because he seemed to have genuine sympathy for the fate of the Habsburg empire and tried to work for its preservation, while the Piłsudskiites had a much more functional, if not to say cynical view of Vienna, which was for them merely an ally of convenience. Of course, we could also argue that Retinger already viewed Polish problems in a larger European context than many of his Polish contemporaries, and that his support for the empire reflected this.

Retinger consistently opposed the creation of a Polish army in the west. This was a result of his vision of the proper course for Polish politics in the war. A Polish army, fighting alongside England and France, organized with Russian collaboration (if not more), would preclude any Austro-Polish solution. Moreover, because Polish units already existed within Austrian forces (the Piłsudskiite legions created in August 1914), a Western Polish force would hopelessly split and embitter Polish ranks. Perhaps worst of all, this Western Polish army would perforce be dominated by the political right — people like Dmowski and Paderewski — who were antithetical to Retinger.¹⁶⁶ Thus, his opposition to the army — in France in the summer of 1914, soon after in the United States, and later in western Europe in 1917 — was a consistent and logical concomitant to his vision of the Polish Question during

164. Regarding contemporary reports of Retinger's supposed pro-Russian attitudes, see, for example, Danuta Płygawko, *Sienkiewicz w Szwajcarji: Z Dziejów akcji dla Polski w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej* [Sienkiewicz in Switzerland: The History of Action on Poland's Behalf During the First World War] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1986), p. 136.

165. In 1938, for example, Retinger told Wincenty Witos that he belonged to the Polish Socialist Party and believed that the "future will be built upon peasants and workers" (Witos, *Moja tulaczka*, p. 460).

166. Here we have to realize that the military contributors of any Polish force in the West would be minuscule but its symbolic value would be considerable and hence constitute a major political advantage for whatever Polish faction was associated with the army, an advantage useful in both an international as well as a particularly Polish context.

the war.¹⁶⁷

Retinger was always involved with broadly based efforts at coalition building and was never a factionalist. During the Great War, he served both the RN and later the CKN, both, at least ostensibly, all-national political coalitions. During the 1930s, he was involved in efforts to create an integrated opposition to the authoritarian government in Warsaw.¹⁶⁸ Immediately after the war began, he was working for an exile government, described as "broad and representative."¹⁶⁹ This effort forms a natural bridge to Retinger's subsequent continental political activities which similarly exhibit concern for consensus and cooperation.

7. Retinger's "internationalism" is essential to understanding him.¹⁷⁰ Its intellectual roots are Catholic and Jesuit, but also reflect his precocious cosmopolitan upbringing and education, and had secular results. In World War I, the vision of a rearrangement of central Europe, including the Austro-Polish solution, and a Franco-Austrian *rapprochement* to end the war, embodied this. Caillaux's influence is also possible. In late 1916, Caillaux argued that the Entente should have as its goal "*maintenir une Europe*," and he described himself as representing *une grande politique qui s'oppose au nationalisme*.¹⁷¹

The Frenchman was afraid of the "balkanization of central Europe, and feared the consequences of Habsburg collapse and German expansion."¹⁷²

In the 1920s, Retinger worked for an active British role in east central Europe, particularly Poland and Czechoslovakia, and played a significant part in formulating the plans for Polish-Czechoslovak federation under Sikorski's direction in late 1939.¹⁷³ Later in the war, Retinger was engaged in planning

167. Siemaszko argued that because Retinger opposed the Polish Army in France in 1917, he *ipso facto* could not have been a Polish patriot. By this logic, however, both Piłsudski and Sikorski, who led Polish forces in Austrian service, were also not Polish patriots (Siemaszko, "Retinger w Polsce," p. 59).

168. The so-called *Front Morges* with which Retinger was associated was essentially an effort at a centrist coalition opposed to both right and left, hence another broadly integrating effort (Walentyyna Korpalska, *Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski: Biografia polityczna* [Władysław Eugeniusz Sikorski: A Political Biography] [Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1981], p. 194).

169. Lubomir Żyblikiewicz, *Polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych i Wielkiej Brytanii wobec Polski, 1944-1949* [The Policy of the United States and Great Britain Towards Poland, 1944-1949] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), p. 81.

170. See the sympathetic sketch by K. A. Jeleniński, "Prekursor anachroniczny" [The Anachronistic Precursor], *Kultura*, no. 7/165-8/166 (1961), pp. 190-195.

171. Caillaux, *Mes Mémoires*, III, pp. 190, 186.

172. Caillaux, *Mes Mémoires*, III, pp. 224-225, 192.

173. Nurek, *Polska w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 287; compare Roman

for “federated blocs” in Europe, especially eastern Europe.¹⁷⁴ The “Benelux” concept was, he claimed, first adumbrated then.¹⁷⁵ These actions reflected what Roman Wapiński has called Retinger’s prewar “dreams . . . of local federations in a confederated Europe.”¹⁷⁶ His postwar role in the European unity movement and ecumenical efforts at Anglican-Roman Catholic reconciliation are thus logical extensions of his early career.¹⁷⁷

During World War I, Józef Retinger was a recklessly ambitious and arrogant young man who threw himself into intrigue and surrounded himself with an air of theatrical mystery. He claimed powerful sponsors and mighty assignments and sometimes told the truth. For those who remain baffled by Retinger and see in him either a mercenary spy or a cynical adventurer, this article responds that he early left a blurred yet nonetheless discernible profile of what he would always be: A cosmopolitan European who envisioned a future continental unity based on the Christian heritage of Rome, a unity in which his Polish homeland would occupy a free, untrammeled and worthy place. With the collapse of communism, a world less instinctively Manichean may find him to be more comprehensible, and perhaps more sympathetic.¹⁷⁸

Wapiński, *Władysław Sikorski* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1978), p. 257. Wandycz regards Sikorski’s initiative in this regard to have been “inspired” by Retinger (“Dwie próby stworzenia związków regionalnych w Europie wschodniej” [Two Attempts to Create Regional Alliances in Eastern Europe] in Piotr Wandycz, *Polska a zagranica* [Poland and Abroad] [Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1986], p. 111).

174. As Anna Cienciala noted, Retinger was working closely with the British in urging federations in the east of Europe (“The Question of the Polish-Soviet Frontier in British, Soviet, and Polish Policy in 1939-1940: The Litauer Memorandum and Sikorski’s Proposal,” *The Polish Review*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1988), pp. 306-307. I am indebted to Prof. Cienciala for directing me to this insight.

175. Jan Ciechanowski, “The Politics of the Polish Government in Exile, 1939-1950” in Keith Sword, editor, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939-1950* (London: University of London, 1989), pp. 163-167. See also Retinger’s *The European Continent: An Address Given on May 7th, 1946* (London: n.p., 1946).

176. Wapiński, *Sikorski*, p. 257.

177. One of the more extraordinary, and dubious, networks attributed to Retinger’s post-World War II activities echoes his First World War links to the Vatican, European reconciliation, and espionage: “. . . Dr. Luigi Gedda, the head of a group called Catholic Action, . . . served as a liaison between the CIA, Joseph Retinger’s European Movement and future Pope Paul VI”; see “The Order of Knights,” <http://www.net-a.com/~ottinger/templar2.txt>.

178. The dedication of a plaque to Retinger in Cracow in the summer of 1997 by supporters of the European unity movement certainly suggests this (Aben, “Sprong naar gouden ELES,” p. 1).